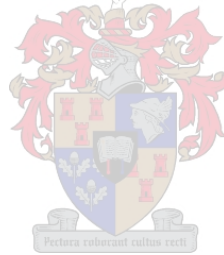


**Vulnerability laid bare, a dialect without utterance:  
the pursuit of an arcane thread of liminality.**

by  
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Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Visual Arts in the Faculty of  
Arts and Social Sciences at Stellenbosch University



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December 2021

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**ABSTRACT**

It has been the harbinger of global chilling - the prelude to the winter of despair. The malevolent plague of Covid-19 has caught the populace off guard, spreading widespread bedlam and fear, thereby exposing the very underbelly of human vulnerability. The rapid spread of this life-threatening virus has been debilitating the harmony of daily routine and sending habitual practice into disarray. This study pursues the notion of a dialect without utterance, and the scrutiny to see whether marks and signs of dis-ease can be detected in both the two-and three-dimensional art form I am making. It is a probe to recognise signs of vulnerability, those which are registered by way of an arcane trace, a sequential thread embedded in the gestures and marks of abject frailty. Covid-19 and all the complications of a plague have provided the backdrop for my research. The practice-based study for this master's degree is essentially motivated by way of visual expression and the written theory attached has provided the verbal substructure, the motivation, and the explanation that underpins this thesis.

**OPSOMMING**

In Wêreldwye afkoelperiode het 'n winter van wanhoop voorafgegaan toe die mensdom onkant gevang is deur 'n vernietigende plaag bekend as Covid-19. Dié pandemie het vrees dwarsdeur die mensdom versprei en barre kwesbaarheid blootgelê. Die pas waarteen die virus versprei, verwond die harmonie van daaglikse roetine en gewoonte. Dit is ook in hierdie verwarring en verbrokkeling van die menslike habitus waarin my kuns haar stem vind. Die studie stel voor dat, ironies genoeg, hierdie stem ook gevorm is in stomheid en ontasbaarheid en as kunsprakties-gebaseerde studie betrag dit die moontlike ontstaan in kunsmaak van 'n gewestelike maar sprakelose taal, 'n vorm-gebaseerde dialek. Dit ondersoek die moontlikheid dat merke en tekens van ongemak en trauma in beide twee- en drie-dimensionele beelde bespeurbaar is. Die kunswerke en die skripsie volg die spore van 'n versluisde maar aaneenlopende ontvloeïing van bedekte betekenis wat ingebed is in die gebare en merke van volslae broosheid. Covid-19 en al die ingewikkeldhede van 'n plaag verskaf gronde vir die studie wat uitdrukking vind in kunsmaak. Bykomend tot kunsmaak is dit hoofsaaklik die teorieë van John Berger wat verbale struktuur, motivering en die begrypinge wat die tesis toelig, verskaf.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This dissertation found its genesis during the impact of Covid-19, a malevolent virus that became a global epidemic. Human life was affected ubiquitously, and the general structure of habitus witnessed a perverse transformation. It was a tsunami of body-life upheaval.

I dedicate this writing to a distinctive trilogy.

First and foremost, this offers as tribute to, and recognition of, those precious people who succumbed to the virus and lost their lives due to Covid-19. May they find a gentle peace.

Secondly to my intrepid supervisor, Professor Elizabeth Gunter, who endorsed my request to register and fulfil all the requirements for procuring a Masters Degree. She held vigil on the pier as she watched me plough through the waves of discovery, supporting my fumbling and praising my endeavour. She stood alert and attentive, overseeing my voyage of discovery in a skiff of my choosing. She provided a veritable lighthouse and beacon of inspiration, of critique and solace.

Thirdly I dedicate this work to my beloved children, Chantal, Berene, Janita and Jason and their dear families, who proffered the wind in my sails, pledging a welcome committee when I returned to a stable footing.

To all of you my sincerest and heartfelt thanks. I am both humbled and extremely grateful for your presence in my life.

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## **INTRODUCTION.**

### **RESEARCH IDEA**

The study investigates the silent language of a footprint, the spoor of precarity, embedded in the frozen skin of an artefact, the dermis that embraces a lexicon of signs mirroring its frailty. The meaning, embedded in a tangible, inanimate art object of my own making, seeks exchange by way of a muted interchange and directs the flow of both my art making and writing, thereby integrating practice and theory to become a whole. I conduct this study within Visual Arts as domain of knowledge, and although I draw from a variety of theorists who work in other domains of knowledge, this study locates itself firmly in the visual arts.

The idea that prompted the study looks at the virulent dissemination of Covid-19, a virus that has pervaded the global populace, and one that has become a phenomenon realigning all signs of stability within the confines of a secure habitus. The impact of the pandemic has ignited an indication of frailty and vulnerability, and I believe these signals have become evident as general countenance has floundered. Such impact of the coronavirus on human behaviour interests me, and my art praxis currently serves as a visual record of the demeanour of vulnerability. I position vulnerability as embedded in my art works, as a tacit, interpretable quality that appears through the act of making without having been pre-planned, designed, or deliberated as subject matter. The idea, vulnerability as a quality that marks human behaviour, leads the core concern of the study around which I develop my art and writing.

### **PROBLEM**

The study revolves around my perception that Covid is transforming human behaviour, its brunt leading to a nadir in the life of the everyday. Vulnerability and precarity come to the fore as fundamental to emotional expression and their sequelae are reflected in the general deportment and conduct of human behaviour, where gestures of frailty can be observed. From the outset of the pandemic, I have sensed a disquiet and unease as reports and news have described the distress of people affected by the virus and I have felt compelled to

capture my own reflections and allow the making of art to convey my perception of this anguish. This afforded the genesis of the research.

**Hypothesis:**

I propose that a tangible artefact can convey meaning, and in this case meaning constitutes the notion of vulnerability. Such frailty is expressed by way of the gestures and marks lodged in the chosen medium, where the choice of medium becomes a vehicle of transference itself.

**THE FOCUS.**

Consequently, the focus of the study is my art, its making, and the subtle changes in its expression that the impact of Covid provokes. A fact that can be seen revealed in my art; a notion signalling vulnerability, a state that communicates something both personal and societal. The central focus is, and will remain, in the manner of communication, ways and means, marks and materials, signs, and signals, all of which will harness and project the notion of vulnerability. The linchpin of the study is the pursuit of an arcane thread that runs throughout and is the motif that is positioned as the backbone of the study.

**RESEARCH QUESTION.**

The title of this research focusses on dialogue, the exchange of data from one to another, and, in this instance, the transfer of a sensation by way of a dialect, a dialect<sup>1</sup> without utterance. It suggests that, as an arcane thread is perceived and grasped in an art object, a state of vulnerability is exposed as a cloned sensation and laid bare.

The idea of baring, of exposing, naturally implies a nakedness and potential vulnerability – a condition wherein there is no defence. Although the term vulnerability is difficult to define,

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<sup>1</sup>The term 'dialect' denotes a certain specificity to the vernacular of the people, that which is confined to and associated with the region or culture in terms of habitual and instinctive ways of being. It can be considered as a language describing a set of idiomatic expressions or forms, a type of verbal 'habitus'. Dialogue on the other hand describes conversing or discussing, that which happens between two or more people and can be conducted with both friends and strangers. P

the sensation of being exposed and helpless is immediately understood by '*an other*'. It is this mutual interaction to which I refer and one which encourages questioning and exploration into the hypothesis that:

- Sensation can be appreciated in a non-verbal sense,
- Marks, and gestures, trapped in an art medium, can and will provide the lexicon of thoughts and feelings.

The study considers only such signals, those that probe how the physical, tangible stuff of the material affords further potential for interpretation - material that allows for the understanding of the palpable sensation of frailty, matter that can enrich and intensify the hypothesis surrounding collapse.

Any number of people have been forced out of their surrounds and evicted due to the threat of the Covid pandemic, their secure form of habitus disrupted. Such images have provided a quintessential portrayal of vulnerability. These humans are without shelter and have scattered, seeking refuge; they are bared, they are exposed. The question positions itself as to how to trap such an abject state in an appropriate medium. In the image *Evacuees* (see Figure 1). Three fractured human forms are presented into which both the sensation of decrepitude and debility are frozen in time. Their broken forms reinforce a state of their being vulnerable, and the materials used are fractured ceramic pieces and fired bones for legs. The absence of feet further stresses an impotence.



Figure 1 : Lapping-Sellars. 2021. *Evacuees*. Clay, Cloth, Bones

The corollary to being defenceless is to clamour for endurance and protection, enveloping such frailty in some form of shroud. The emotional swathing becomes manifest in the seeking of shelter, of going home, even the pursuit of arcane comfort in prayer, rituals, and traditional cultural rites. The apposite topic of home and shelter is expanded on in Chapter Six, whilst some form of procedure to harness the notion of ceremony will linger through the text. Death has become intrinsically woven into the impact of Covid and many people have succumbed to the virus, often deprived of any formal burial. The intention in this instance is to probe how to convey such harsh reality within the confines of my praxis and its choice of material. Both offering concepts of Disintegration and Restitution.

The central focus, and manner of communication in my art making, is to discover ways and means, marks and materials, signs, and signals, that will harness and project the supposition of vulnerability. The notion of discovery propels the development of the thesis, pursuing an arcane thread, a querulous search of detection.

## **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES.**

The arcane innuendo in my art demands investigation, ramifying it into becoming a central issue of exploration. The objective would be to trace the underlying and ephemeral notion of muted sensation, that which pervades my art.

Objectives are set out and will become issues to focus on, as the study unfolds. Those being:

- To inform myself on the meaning and reach of vulnerability,
- To comprehend the intangible as power in my art,
- To harness the roles of perception, reciprocity, and habitus in understanding communication and social engagement/interaction.

Such objectives will become manifest as both the praxis and the research unfold, the goal being to provide a receptive, flexible mindset to absorb and comprehend each sign as it presents itself. The title suggests that the sensation of vulnerability can be harnessed as a gesture, embedded and trajected via marks in the forged objects, perceived and created by the artist's making. The enigmatic questioning lies both in the demeanour of the objects and the chosen medium. There are several confusingly interrelated parts and for this reason the answer, as response, will be both multifaceted and labyrinthian in decoding. A simplistic answer to the enigmatic question on how to project the sensation of vulnerability, is 'because I say it is so', but this study is more complex than offering an easy retort. The maker and the viewer provide unique and individual insights to this art experience and their understanding. Both the idea of vulnerability and the success of its interpretation can be disparate and a far cry from the intention. It remains a conundrum and continues to provide the consistent thread of query and discovery permeating the research and becoming the arcane thread which repeatedly meanders through the thesis.

The work I make is very much an amalgam of ideas, emotions, and materials, all of which become assembled to capture some form of mental stimulus or sensation. Behind the act of creation hovers a form of liminality, a possible underlying prompt that is trapped and projected in my work as I shape each piece. The term liminality is a mysterious concept, one which is described as an intangible threshold between one space and another. On other occasions it is used to describe the middle ground of being neither here nor there, hinting at

the loss of what has been and the angst of what is to come. A place of limbo if you will. As ephemeral as this sounds, the intangible message of signalling is ever present. It is to this end that both my work and my theory is focused, and the aim is to fathom and decipher the lexicon of signs.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The discussion above leads me to understand that this study is about communication between humans, including the artist, the viewing audience, and the artwork wherein the ephemeral notion of an arcane language is embedded. The artwork in other words acts as informer. Vulnerability during Covid-19 is positioned as the trigger which prompted the creation of my art objects, and the research investigates how such an ephemeral phenomenon can be manifest. The first method of communication is by way of the muted dialect, here presented as a form of 'verbal habitus' and portrayed in the art medium as a series of frozen gestures which are both familial and cultural. On the other hand, the second form is positioned in the arcane dialogue or conversation that will present itself as a form of exchange, whereby the artist's ideas are perceived by the viewer and a mutual notion of understanding is acknowledged. Both dialect and dialogue become instruments of communication in a sea of transient perceptions. In this regard, Berger (1984:50) purports:

The visible both includes him (because he sees) and excludes him (because he is not omnipresent). The visible consists for him of the seen, which even when it is threatening, confirms his existence, and of the unseen which defies that existence. The desire to *have seen* – the ocean, the desert, the aurora borealis - has a deep ontological basis.

We experience life-world through our body-mind, but we share life-world through language, art, and culture. Language, art, and culture, in turn, set the terms for how we perceive what we experience. This understanding underpins the study and determines the conceptual framework thereof. The framework entails the circularity of human interaction in life-world, that of flow between perception, conception, and productive action in particular. Therefore, concepts pertaining to vulnerability, the arcane, reciprocity, reversibility, temporality,

encoding and decoding of meaning and signification, relate and function in the study to direct my thinking. The subconscious being of my perception outlines the conceptual framework of the study. I investigate how, by way of exchange and interchange with the viewer, I can create a dialogue, thereby forging a conversation between the maker, the artwork, and the viewer - weaving a ring around empathetic reciprocity, the completion of a gestalt.

My art encompasses a visual language both personal and private to me. By making art and by giving shape to my thoughts, I create material-form from sensations that are embedded at a subconscious level - sensations for which I do not have words. I suggest that through my art, I externalise that which has become internalised within me. Shapes and forms emerge and resonate out of that which has been observed and for which I experience a deep empathetic response. Such images emerge like an echo of things seen, knowing known, feelings felt. Slowly configured, the objects become artefacts, encoded with memory, often associated with times passed, those which have emerged from deep time.

The idea of encoding suggests an encrypted lexicon of memory, an internalised cache of that which has impacted on the eye and the depth of one's being. It is a form of perceptual impact through which experience becomes encoded into a genre of recall, accessed through thought, sound, word, or deed. Decoding, on the other hand, requires the ability to recognise, to unravel and to decipher data, a skill to fathom the signs and convert the information into a comprehensible form. This could infer and refer to the dictates of earlier generations, iconographic elements of culture, cultural nous, previous education, personal experience, or even systems of behaviour - such data which could be passed on, or passed down, in a non-genetic way from one human being to another.

The idea of vulnerability, or of being vulnerable, is the fundament of emotional bearing, and, in times of disquiet and unrest, a sense of torpor and anxiety becomes manifest in the creature's behaviour. All living organisms are vulnerable and when under threat, they project a frailty in countless forms. The challenge is how to read them and how to capture

them because humans often deliberately veil or disguise vulnerability to prevent detection. Berger (1984:50) infers:

The visible consists of the seen, confirming existence, and of the unseen which defies that existence. To this human ambiguity of the visible, one has then to add the visual experience of absence, whereby we no longer see what we saw.

The interaction between humans observing and being observed is indicated by Merleau-Ponty (1968:131) on the notion of Reversibility. He 'portrays' reversibility with his words "My body model of the things, and the things model of my body", suggesting an intimacy between ourselves and life-world of such fusion and irrevocable merging, that one becomes the other. Such intimacy would also include the ability to recognise our own vulnerability in the visual image bound within the concept of a laterally transcended perception – thus leading to 'a perceptual bending back on itself.' On the other hand, the notion of Reflexivity encourages an understanding of self-awareness, a perceptual insight into the personal and private mindset of self, and by so doing, further knowledge and appreciation of self-as-being becomes known. Merleau-Ponty (1968:131) writes:

The relation between us and our surroundings is paradoxical. On the one hand, we sometimes feel that we and the things around us are part of a seamless whole. On the other hand, things often resist our efforts to assimilate them to our purposes. We then experience them as separate from us and sometimes even as alien.

In the writings of both Berger and Merleau-Ponty there resides a type of cause and effect, of an awareness that something has happened, or something is going to happen. In both cases, there is the unsaid notion of a cognisance, a consciousness, providing recall in the form of back-and-forth events, whereby a time factor must exist - time as is perceived by humans in conscious manner. To continue this argument, I suggest that the mere idea of absence and presence, of being part of one large whole, and yet experiencing the sensation of being



withdrawn and alone, hints at the body in time. It engenders the physical existence of a beginning and an end, and positions Time as a factor in this study.

Time is defined as an indefinite progress of existence and introducing it into this study provides further evidence of the liminality and the arcane, that which permeates this debate. Time has been the subject of countless debates for centuries. Temporality, the state of being within *real* time, has become very much part of the spatial position trapped in both my words and my works, somehow pinning down the string of past, present and future and leading sporadically to confusion as to specific time - did it happen, is it happening, will it happen- leading at intervals to an hiatus driven by fear. The time during the onset of Covid has become an interminable period of uncertainty and the intention to examine time in relation to my praxis will be considered in Chapter Four.

From the outset, the evidence of an underlying thread residing within the underbelly of each piece has become prevalent, the motif of which has presented as an enigma of arcane nature. Seemingly intangible it has come to reiterate the notion of being without utter, a 'muted wording', but nonetheless known and recognised. Mutuality and reciprocity therefore pertain. But also, poesy. Visual dialogue is a rudimentary form of communication and can be observed from the day an infant can focus. The child sees the mother, and the mother sees the child; there is immediate understanding, reciprocity bound within a muted dialogue. Poesy goes beyond the rudimentary. It captures the essence of the intonations of sound and imagery by way of the arcane as an expression of the psyche. Poesy projects image by way of exquisite wording. My art proposes that this form of non-verbal connection is the inherent crux to the *sine qua non* of social encounter.

## LITERATURE

The literature for this research, and that which serves as epistemological basis, has found its essence in the scholastic philosophies of poets, art historians and phenomenologists – often returning and bending back to the expression of poetic writing in which the nub of this

thesis resides. Poetry is the way of concentrating on the imaginative awareness of experience, it is a register of perception and sentiments based purely on the emotional response system of the psyche. Poetry can capture such response with its economy of poignant wording, reaching the internal core of the soma. As poetry is composed of its words and defined by its expression, so can a gesture, or mark, be locked in some material that captures a quintessential mood, its signing portrayed with a single wave. An efficacy of expression.

The writing of Berger provides one of the sound bases for this study, namely a block of words or 'pages', in search of resolution to capture the spirit of liminality. As artist, writer, poet, and historian Berger's writings encapsulate 'an essence of being' and as such are efficacious regarding the interpretation of the liminality of sensation. As a self-acclaimed Marxist, he used his reasoning and rationale as an analytical tool for debate, and as an artist, his understanding of artmaking bonded with his writing to provide a comprehensive argument. His contribution to the interpretation of vulnerability is a focus on the infirm and the frail, his personal angst ever betrayed as he identified with the never-ending narrative of hardship and survival. His astute contribution defines the evacuated self, the nature of time and the inevitability of death, all of which bestow poetic idiom to the study. Berger's thinking on the seen, and the unseen, on appearance and disappearance provides pertinent discourse for this study and resonates with the writings of Merleau-Ponty who describes the visible and the invisible. This relationship between Merleau-Ponty's and Berger's thinking is important to the study.

Bachelard, as both scientist and philosopher, strove to comprehend the way art and science might bind equally to comprehend the dynamics of the imagination, and such study led him to his fascination with poetry. Poetry and beyond. He used the intuitive and imaginative to foster thought process frequently using 'poetic licence' to capture metaphorical thinking. In this instance, his notion of the mind as house, house as vessel containing many rooms, suggests the idea that each room (as subliminal thought process) has its own unique place and function, and yet the totality is entwined and belongs to one domain, one habitus. The individual self.

## **METHODOLOGY.**

This study proposes that a vulnerable state of mind and body can be conveyed as body language, a type of embodiment, whereby such sensation of frailty is exposed to those extraneous to itself. This claim hinges on the perception and making of the artist's creativity, that which would require a keen observation of human behaviour, a topical interest in current affairs and a definitive recording of extant data.

Vulnerability has prompted the creation of objects that serve as some form of reflection both of, and on, the abject. This is a subjective notion that does prompt questioning as to whether this is both plausible and true, seeking to prove that an artwork can be replete with the inner workings of an organic message and teeming with covert signs. Without verbal dialogue, such insights will demand honest circumspection. My central thesis is motivated by abject frailty and, as such, will trace the symbiotic nature of my theoretical readings and the chosen medium of my practice: this praxis providing the artefacts under question which will serve as source material.

At this stage, the basic tenets of practice-based methodology demand focus on the responsiveness to theoretical writing related to this topic. In addition, it requires that my current praxis reflects a heuristic stand, both by way of my personal perspective, and the encouragement of a fresh view for the spectator, both important as response to vulnerability of Covid-19 unfolds. As I pursue my reading, my writing, and my artmaking, dialogue and debate will prevail throughout. The methodology of my praxis will underpin the way I create art and even the way I capture my thinking in words.

As I remain conscious of the spread of the coronavirus through communities, I target specific moments when groups of people are subjected to expulsion for fear of their further infecting large communities. Frequently this affects impoverished folk. It is to this end that I try to capture miniscule moments in time to document their plight. Within these past months, I have become aware of fresh avenues of thought on the topic of vulnerability, issues of which I had not been aware earlier, and these I have every intention of

investigating - the idea of appreciating the nature of vulnerability, the notion that vulnerability is defined through cultural interpretation, and the thought that a frail state can be curtailed by way of talismans and incantations.

## INDICATION OF OUTCOME

The work I make is very much an amalgam of ideas, emotions, and materials, all of which become assembled to capture some form of mental stimulus or sensation. Behind the act of creation hovers a form of liminality, a possible underlying prompt that is trapped and projected in my work as I shape each piece. The term liminality is itself a mysterious concept, one which is described as an intangible threshold between one space and another. On other occasions, it is used to describe the middle ground of being neither here nor there, hinting at the loss of what has been and the angst of what is to come. A place of limbo if you will. As ephemeral as this sounds, the intangible message of signalling is ever-present. It is to this end that both my work and my theory is focused, and my intent is fathoming the visual dictionary of gesture, mark, and shape.

I suggest that the work I undertake may be construed as a form of repertory, a tale to be viewed, in perceptible terms, as a visual metaphor in which the protagonist, in the guise of Vulnerability, haunts the stage. Chapter One, **The Title**, prepares the ground and facilitates the scene, providing the diegesis, preparing the reader for the progression of the narrative; a time frame in which the dissertation unfolds, shrouded issues are raised and withdrawn. Intrigue is proffered by way of an arcane thread which creates a tension throughout the rest of the study. The final chapter, as denouement, concludes with certain resolution. The curtain closes and the reader is afforded an Epilogue to complete the story.

This germane explanation affords dissemination of the title and the work of the research.

## CHAPTER OUTLINE

### Chapter One.

The Title: Due consideration investigates the title, its choice of wording and the implication of its meaning. From the outset, the study shows concern for a language and a method for conveying information by way of a muted voice. Both the maker and the viewer are positioned as such to survey the artefact as their source of information, data embedded within itself. It emerges as a dialect whose diction is embedded in signs. A signalling of frailty lodged in an art medium. The title encapsulates the intention to follow a response system and pursue a thought process in the quest for clarity.

### Chapter Two

Human being Human: Although the constant emphasis is positioned on the arcane thread of ephemerality, it remains decidedly within the realm of the sheer physicality of BEING. Humans being humans. They who are a composite of all consciousness, embedded with notions of weakness and frailty, successes, and failures, memories, and reflections, knowing and ignorance. Humans are humans and, intrinsic to this research, is the importance of the sense of **actual being**, that of the human who is both artmaker and viewer. This chapter considers aspects of the presence of 'being human' and its relation to the state of being vulnerable.

### Chapter Three.

Coordinating Opinion: Integrally woven into the exercise of such practice-based theory lies the interpretation of human opinion, and, as individual stance is singular and unique, the evaluation of independent appraisal will contribute to the overall study of this writing. The study incorporates a brief look at the work of other artists (Edmund de Waal, Allison Schulnick, and Anna Buckner) who in one way or another have made work which projects signs of vulnerability or a sense of liminality. It closes with a reminder and a hint that this study is an ongoing narrative definitively related to time: Chronos, as nemesis or not.

### Chapter Four

The Pendulum as Chronometer: The notion of time, albeit complex and diverse in interpretation, offers an important factor to the narrative of the virus. One which seemingly

had a beginning in time and which, over time, has provided challenges to the lifestyle of the global populace. Berger (1984:10) writes: “In reality we are always between two times: that of the body and that of consciousness”. It is to this end that Chapter Four investigates time.

## Chapter Five

The Marrow laid Bare. The core of creation is distinctly lodged in the marrow of the maker. This is a practice-based study and therefore the deep-seated compulsion to create lies firmly in the bones and the marrow of its maker. This chapter delves into the thinking, the imagination, and the process of creative activity. There is no definitive explanation for the said compulsion to create artefacts, and yet it is ubiquitously understood that artmaking has a language of its own, a unique method to express thoughts, feelings, emotions, that for which there are no words. This writing explores the hypothesis of creativity which resides in the marrow and comes out in the medium. A diction of materials and a dialogue between artist and viewer.

## Chapter Six

The Denouement and The Epilogue:

This being the conclusive finale of the study and the denouement of the research, it provides closure to the tangled thread of rhetoric which has become the fabric of this work. It is a two -and -three-dimensional tome of written pages and fabricated objects which have meshed as one unit to become a single item. It is a **complete vessel**, a totality, whose bare and vacant inner contains the description of response and habitual behaviour during Covid. It is the denouement and the genesis. The alpha and the omega.

## **CHAPTER ONE.**

### **The Title**

#### **Vulnerability laid bare, a dialect without utterance: The pursuit of an arcane thread of liminality.**

##### **Introduction**

In the first chapter I use the title as framework to explain its choice of wording and what those words infer. Language, as interface for conveying information, be it verbal or visual, is emitted by way of muted voice. It poses the central concern in relation to the study's objective which is to comprehend the intangible as power in my art. As I have explained in the Introduction, I position that the artist and the viewing audience reflect on the artwork, and read the artwork as legible text, whereby I propose that my art reads as visual text, a dialect whose diction is embedded in signs. As artist and maker, I encode my art with meaning, (intentionally or unintentionally, and always interpretable) lodging signs in an art medium. I use the title in this manner because it, as I have stated in the Introduction, encapsulates the intention to follow a response system and pursue a thought process in the quest for clarity. The reader must be warned, however, that the narrative of this study follows twists and turns, just as one idea is resolved, another presents itself in a different guise. This is largely to do with the complexity placed firmly in the title itself. It encases a myriad of suggestion and potential. A mental image of it suggests it can be likened to a whirligig with many arms and in constant movement; a challenging and intricate package to handle and even more complicated to unwrap. To somewhat contain its meanderings, I structure the chapter as follows:

##### **1.1 The Title Unpacked**

##### **1.2 The Title as Rubric**

##### **1.3 The Title as Sensation**

##### **1.4 The Title as Chimera**

##### **1.5 The Title as Instigator**

##### **1.6 The Title as Nomenclature**

##### **1.7 The Title as Agitator**

## 1.1 The Title Unpacked

The title of the thesis enfolds the discourse of silent conversation, the arcane language shared between the art maker, the artwork, and the viewer. The notion proffers that the artefact, as a tangible object, is positioned to act as sole interpreter, the single, plausible, and only visual component which acts as intermediary and mediator for ably conveying the muted message of vulnerability – travelling from one domain across to another, and back.

The research idea was formulated during lockdown when an underlying thread between the notion of vulnerability and the imagery of my art emerged. Furthermore, it fostered the view that the art I was making could enable and encourage a type of inter-generational, inter-era transmission. In so doing, I would harness the intersection between my visual art practice and its theoretical underpinnings. The document at hand traces the silent language embedded in my art objects – pieces created during the pandemic. It follows the surreptitious trail of covert signs during Covid-19, marks that captured the harsh truths of anguish which humans have been confronting in their daily lives.

My praxis, above all else, has been committed to capturing thoughts and feelings due to the impact of Covid-19. The overriding drive has been to apprehend the trepidation and fear of vulnerability observed and felt by so many. When Kristeva (1982) probed the nature of the Abject, it was through her own acumen of detection that she wrote of how an arcane thread of mutual understanding becomes ruptured and collapses, something that had been shared between the observer and the observed. Prior to this breakdown, societal conventions would have been established and comprehended, providing distinct parameters of behaviour, those being both understood and accepted as customary; traditions with rites, rituals and meaning – mutually understood by both parties. Thus, when one party displays atypical, woeful behaviour and signs of extreme vulnerability, it is then that the said thread is broken, and cultural structure disintegrates. The state of abjection is one of the factors responsible for the breakdown, and it is the observer who witnessed such state that the rupture is perceived.



During the making of such artefacts, I detected a strange anomaly evolving. I noticed certain quirks in the marks, gestures and use of materials (see Figure 2). Several bodies materialized armless, featureless, bowed; modelled from fragile porcelain that had been fired and smoked. Such deviations were far removed from the familiar methodology in my practice, I realized that my perception (and fear) of the virus had been trapped in my objects – homing in on my own vulnerability. I grasped that inherent in my work abides the notion of a vulnerable being, a fact which drives my perception of reality, and which provides the impulse to capture my mental state. It is for this reason that vulnerability serves as a driver, albeit not the protagonist of the narrative, but as the inner prompt for empathetic comeback.



Figure 2 : Lapping-Sellars. 2020. *Repatriation*. (Detail of section). Mixed media

The actual state of being vulnerable defies definition. The character of its being and its interface of messaging is a state found in all living matter. Yet being of an arcane nature and devoid of words, it possesses no scope of oral expression. That said, its missive can be impactful, apprehended and construed as a silent dialect, a message without utterance.

Defining communication, Merleau-Ponty (1968: 34 - 39) has suggested that language is:

...beyond the movement of pure significations and remains the silent mass of the discourse; that which is not of the order of the sayable.... it is the expression to disclose a continuous passage from the word to being, and from being to the word, a double openness of the one upon the other.

I quote this, and, at the same time, suggest that the term 'word', in this context, is construed as a form of 'telling' through shared innuendo and entendre. During the current epidemic of the coronavirus, the guise of vulnerability has assumed a variety of configurations, some overtly tragic, others more furtive to interpret. It has made itself felt by taunting the human psyche and creating an abject state of living, prompting tragedy, and evoking profound empathy in its wake. Since the beginning of 2020, the impact of the Coronavirus has played a major role in my personal art praxis, and this pervading notion has continued to leave its footprint. Such marks have appeared lodged in my work, creating lasting impressions that can be recognized as the idiom of my art making (see Figure 3).

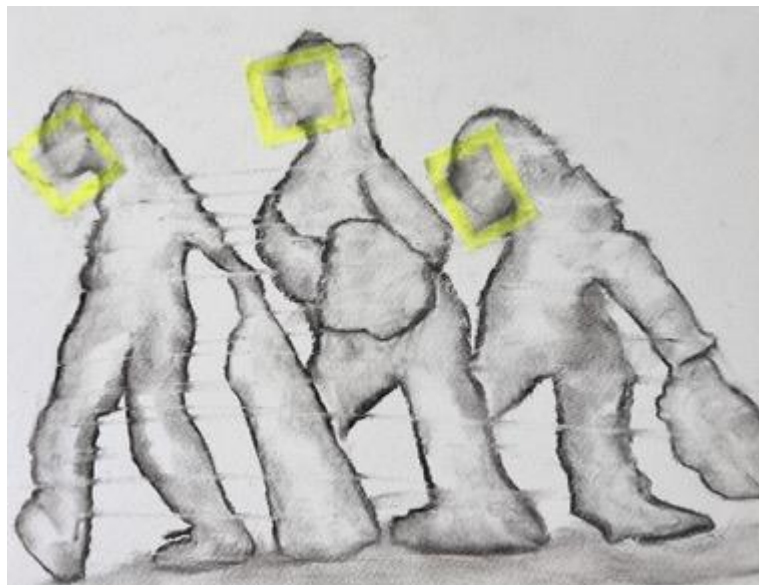


Figure 3 : Lapping-Sellars.2020. *Going Home*. Graphite

## 1.2. The Title: as Rubric

The theory surrounding the underlying message within the title is a starting point, a place and a phrase composed of transient wording. It is a discussion around the enigmatic framework of the thesis – a treatise wherein *vulnerability and its trajectory*, both terms ephemeral of substance, are positioned in my praxis. Vulnerable is intrinsic to the human condition, and in fact to all living matter. As such this is not the issue but **being vulnerable** is an inherent quality that has the potential to register a state of being harmed. Witnessing something which is harmed can be recognised in a variety of ways. and how this is trajected is of prime importance. It is somewhat capricious to try to decipher the way frailty can be seen, but if each case is separately determined, each sign of *being* is unique and can be decoded.

I suggest that the evidence itself is '*sui generis*'. In the case of physical frailty, the condition displays symptoms quite different from those incurred by mental illness; and to pursue this thinking, a vulnerable state of body-mind, whose very underbelly is due to the global pandemic, may present as a totally different indicator altogether. Accordingly, there is a multitude of indicators that can be construed as the cause of some sort of malaise. The point I am making is that every living thing is vulnerable as a matter of course, and every individual has the capacity to be fragile and to feel vulnerable, and yet it does not follow that a frail state of either body or mind will present in the same way, nor, I wish to add, be understood by any passing, arbitrary encounter.

The issue and focus now is whether such frailty can be captured in an art object and then be understood by a bystander. And, to persist further, I question *which manner, driver or tell-tale sign* will have sufficient impact to ensure that the frail state is recognised by another individual. Such conjecture and debate will become key issues providing further debate. I must stress that these are *the labyrinthine* obstacles that need unravelling; the point being that defining the way objects are viewed requires a certain perspicacity of vision and

intuitive empathy of sentiment<sup>2</sup>. All these coded and incorporeal, nonmaterial facts persist to harness reasoning in some verbal form.

My speculation becomes further convoluted as complexity abounds. The reason being that since both **insight and perception** are factors required to recognize 'a vulnerable state', a discerning acumen seems vital for the broad understanding for either observing or recognising frailty. In other words, HOW do we know such thing is troubled? If the idea that a certain cognizance seems pertinent and plausible, one can extrapolate that any signs of frailty will certainly require insight and perception to comprehend such signs embedded in an artwork. I reiterate that insightful and perceptual qualities would need to be in place to decipher the coding.

*And yet is this true? I postulate that although everyone is potentially frail, it does not follow that everyone can see frailty in others, even though frailty is just part and parcel of the human condition. It is only when a heightened awareness is prevalent that a certain consciousness discerning that of another mindset can grasp **the nature** of the other. Someone may display both the capacity for empathy and reciprocal encounter yet being connected to another human does not necessarily imply a reciprocity of understanding.*

Insight and perception belong to the upshot of mental acumen<sup>3</sup>, something developed during childhood, and much of it depends on the ingrained tenor of upbringing from the adult people surrounding the child. Such maturing is further complicated by way of the vast system of inculcating behavioural messages to the child. Cultural dictates, empathetic identity and religious doctrine are some of the drivers which make or mar both insightful and perceptual qualities. I continue to stress these facts because I need to resolve my personal issues related to the response of the viewer. I make art, objects that have been

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<sup>2</sup> I do not imply that this need for perceptual acumen is necessarily a thing associated with age, education, class, or financial status. Empathetic intuition exists in an arcane way in a variety of people, and can be seen from the youngest, poorest child to the wealthiest ageing man. It appears to be something related to emotional intelligence, and the ability to identify sensation and feeling extraneous to the self. This point is discussed further into the study.

<sup>3</sup> By acumen I imply the ability to make reasonable judgment, or capable of a quick decision. A sharp reflex.

prompted by the impact of Covid-19, pieces which have become a reflection of such frailty (see Figure 4).



Figure 4 : Lapping-Sellars.2020. *Covid-19* Mixed media

And I ponder constantly whether the signs of malaise will be understood. I wrestle to believe that the gestures and the marks lodged in my work are 'legible' to the spectator. I fully appreciate that each encounter with another will create some form of dialect. But I am

seeking a **lingua franca** of mark making, the ‘holy grail’ of silent discourse, the bourn of my intention. The acme!

I return to the title and its wording, wherein lies the imperative stipulation to decode the stance upon which the words reside: *vulnerability laid bare, a dialect without utterance*. The study concerns itself with a hypothetical ‘message’, a trope shifting from one abstract concept to another, all conveyed by way of a tangible object, an artefact. The thrust behind the definition of vulnerability lies decisively within subjective interpretation, which, in turn, depends largely on human understanding. And human beings are complex. They are combinations of both their genetic make-up and their environmental dictate.

The debate around nature versus nurture goes unabated and it remains an ongoing topic well documented by Ridley in *Nature via Nurture* (2003), inter alia. Cultural signifying and familial habits become deeply encoded messages, customs that are immersed in the belly of the beast. Therefore, *what* the message says, *how* the message is transferred, and the *velocity* of its success is fundamental to this research. If vulnerability as a notion is embedded in each artefact, such thinking will be compounded by the fact that the individuals involved accord their personal complexities as both makers and interpreters. The art appraiser who is involved in interpreting such convoluted information, is faced with these challenges, notwithstanding that the artist too will present personal issues and individual, intricate characteristics.

Accordingly, as the thesis focusses on the arcane discourse, it is imperative that conjecture remains alert as to the myriad of taciturn gestures and nuanced signs – all within the dialect rooted in each artwork. Perspicacity is imperative to decipher who is making the art, what is being made, how it is structured, where it is seen, and which signs are recognised by the viewer to assemble some sort of consensus regarding the validity of the argument. A complicated notion, indeed.

The nature **via** nurture theory aligns itself to the fact that the character of both art maker and viewer will exact their personal narrative, their unique ancestral inheritance, and their intrinsic behavioural patterning. As such, the way the message is decoded, depends heavily on **interpretation**, and as point of fact, such certitude will uphold the success or failure of the trajectory as messenger. Merleau-Ponty (2017) suggested that his goal was to understand the relation between consciousness and nature which is a myriad of events outside of each other and yet held together by a form of causation. But there remains an inherent contingency within the **grasp** of message. Signals and coded communiqué that are part of the dialogue between the other **must be understood**. Yet, images, symbols, codes do find their way into art as encoded expression, and they become an interface between artist and life-world, between artist and viewing audience, between viewing audience and artwork, between life-world, artist, and viewing audience, back and forth, clashing, finding overlap, resonating, informing. The very portrayal by way of a facial expression, the pathos of begging, the ambience of mood, posture, poise – even clothing - **project and tell** of frailty.

Habitus enfolds what is understood as ‘nature’, embedded in and yet extraneous to each individual, and such inner response system will naturally impact on reaction to and understanding of the habitus of another. Coded into the psyche lie symbols and signs – and these are a veritable cache acquired over years of experience – and as such have the capacity to recognise those of another.

### **1.3. The Title: as Sensation.**

The term *Vulnerability*, as such, is not the topic of my research, yet it will continue to exist as a non-material by-product of my artmaking and a constant signature of its existence. Vulnerability positions itself as an idea in the objects I create, and, as such, it possibly exists in an arcane vacuum of marks, signs, and gestures. It is the end-product of some ‘thing’ or some sensation that impacted my deep sub-conscious and which, at the time, I internalized. Later, much later, this sensation will be manifest in some form, externalized, and encased within some artefact.

The pandemic has changed much of what we assumed as normal; it has subtly changed how we live, move, and engage between each other. It has altered the way we interrelate and, in fact, how we view people generally. Social encounter is no longer a spontaneous happening, 'social distancing' prevents this. There are many more beggars on the streets, fewer cars on the road, people are hungry. Caution prevents our 'just being together', fear demands masks being worn, and hands being washed all day. Suddenly terminology such as lockdown, sanitize, isolation, ventilators, efficacy of vaccine – all roll off the tongue, terms which had not been used in daily utterance are now mundane sounds and part of diurnal jabber. Such perpetual onslaught of discordant (see Figure 5) issues have made daily headlines and have certainly had profound impact on the sensibilities of everyone.



Figure 5 : Lapping-Sellars. 2020. *Befuddled Thoughts of One*. Ink/Stitch

During the global pandemic I have been conscious of the impact of social life, and my work has been prompted by the plight and fragile state caused to humanity all over the world. As I see it, the gravest issue has been that no one was prepared, and nothing was foreseen. The sudden impact created a discombobulated state of security – personal safety, ill-health, diminished wealth, deprived social encounter, lockdown – the list is endless. All of this has caused extreme anxiety and created major vulnerable issues. As stated earlier, everyone is potentially vulnerable all the time, but this pandemic has created global frailty, the extent of



which has seldom been seen in the world today. I stress these facts, because this research is **not** about vulnerability per se, but a study relating to the triggers generated by the virus; those which have wreaked havoc and impaired the equanimity of everyday living.

I am watching this unfold as I observe signs of poverty, mental issues, and serious unease. Behaviour has changed as people adjust their thinking. In discussion with Elizabeth Gunter, supervisor (2021), I have conceded that I ever aim to theorize on the amorphous, intangible nature of 'Vulnerability', an arcane condition that reveals as a recognisable, evocative quality in and of the art I create. Not necessarily visually discernible or recognisable as a feature, but somehow present – *there* – as something beyond concept, something 'not in the order of the sayable'; 'a dialect of the unutterable', and in terms of visibility, 'a spectre of the unseen', something beyond guise.

*A dialect of the unutterable* is a notion which will unfold as the basis of emotional underpinning, a concept whereby the idea of vulnerability and its residuum will naturally provide many views for understanding human behaviour in all its forms. The key issue posits a quest for discovering and giving material form to something as abstract and ephemeral as vulnerability. The study will follow the underlying thread of its essence – as it weaves and binds the material and the mind-map of signs, sensations, gestures, and marks into the matrix of my hypotheses. I stress that this semiotic<sup>4</sup> depiction is understood by way of identifying a *feeling* couched in an aesthesis of empathy. Vulnerability is a feeling and, as such, is styled in a multitude of guises, existing ubiquitously as a state of being. For this reason, it can be observed and read intuitively, sensed in the reciprocal exchanges of empathy. Ideas, beliefs, and codified systems are embedded within the nature of every human being.

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<sup>4</sup> I also stress that this is not a semiotic study that employs the methodologies of Semiotics. Rather, I employ the term as it relates in linguistic terms to symbolic visual language as it materializes in art form. As explained in the Introduction under Methodology, this is a practice-based study in which artistic research directs the flow of both making and thinking.

Anthropologists use the word *Mentefact*, a term coined by Julian Huxley (Gnoli. 2018:2) to describe a way of refining the notion of culture and its symbols, and, as such, the word '*Mentefact*' became a driver and even an attribute for deciphering cultural messaging. Huxley suggested that traits take on a life of their own, they span generations, and can even be conceived as objects themselves. Hypothetically, this suggests that most of what we are is determined by what we inherit, what we hear, what we learn and what we know. As I have pointed out above (see 1.2), this study considers how coding of both a vulnerable state of body-mind can be captured and embedded in a palpable artefact and trajected later into the ether. The interpretation and appreciation of each form depend on the expression of the artwork, its situation and the viewer's comprehension. It will require the decoding of the visual components of my praxis during the global epidemic, and an in-depth survey of any arcane information that is possibly perceived and shared with another human, and then passed on and shared with still another.

Humans fall into step with social norm and societal convention from the very day they are born. I cite Bourdieu (1979: vii) and the term *habitus*<sup>5</sup> which literally refers to the practice of deeply ingrained habits, skills, and behaviours, those which we develop from birth and continue through the many experiences of life – right down to our taste in art, in food and in clothing. Such habits provide the very bedrock upon which social structure is spawned and they provide the point of departure, or springboard, for observational and perceptual skills. It is the substratum of human response since it is upon such customary habitude and pattern of deportment that humans perform their daily lives, trusting such archetypes as viable exemplars for protection and survival. It is for this reason that when such *habitus* is fractured, blatant signs of vulnerability and decrepitude start to show. Coping skills become expended if, and when, the said *habitus* is ruptured.

The threat of the Coronavirus outbreak engendered turmoil and deferred daily life. It was at this time that this study realized its genesis. The framework for this research paper found its

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<sup>5</sup> Bourdieu defined *habitus* as follows: "The *habitus* is a system of durable, transposable *dispositions* which functions as the generative basis of structured, objectively unified practices" (1979: vii).

voice as the ruptured state of vulnerability was seen to be crumbling, creating clear signs of fragmented disintegration. The resulting dissertation became its own artwork as it documented and followed a narrative, a chronicle with a beginning and an end, a nascence, and a denouement. The phenomenon of Covid-19 does have a beginning, a story, a history. Could this be a diachronic account of human behaviour at this time? Both its impact and its meaning do arise out of a strange, esoteric time frame, something which demanded exchange between humans, people desperate to understand and position a way to conduct themselves to stay safe and protect those around them.

I am of the persuasion that, throughout my research, a thread has materialized, a recurring theme; the deciphering and describing of the chimera called 'vulnerability'. Although it is not the topic of research, it does provide a leitmotif in the form of a Hydra, that water-snake creature with nine heads. Throughout, it worms its way by dint of marks and, by adopting various guises, it provides a cyclical trope, a haunting melody that changes key from major to minor to major again. It permeates the work – shifting the timbre yet sustaining interest and impact.

VULNERABILITY: What art Thou?

Perchance a nebulous, amorphous sensation.

Perceived in an instant.

Packaged as a feeling. Captured and frozen in artefact.

Recognized ubiquitously.

#### **1.4 The Title: A chimera, a misnomer.**

The Title perforce is a metaphorical bid to harness the notion of a sensation, *vulnerability laid bare*, an image whose intention is to project the notion of frailty using an arcane dialect via a handmade art object. The thrust is an endeavour to communicate an idea, and to devise a system of communication between the art maker and the viewer. It also offers the opinion that not only do both parties share an intimate moment of social intercourse, but an experience of a consciousness of sort, which they, in turn, can share the very covert message with another, and another. According to Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy

(2011: 5) Heidegger, in his work *Being and Time* introduced the concept of ‘*Dasein*’ or “Being there, where the external world is reduced to the content of personal consciousness” And I proffer that, **being conscious** allows each party to offer individual perception and experience for some sort of social engagement. ‘Being’ offers a responsive awareness; it incites, demands, and encourages interaction.

Every life is touched by an abundance of personal stimuli, a veritable melange of both heartening and hampering prods, a quantum soup of real-world living. The result behoves an individual mindset whereby a uniqueness of being evolves. Such impetus and incitement can become onerous as we become burdened with an overload of information. Bures (2016: 172) suggests,

the stories we believe, scripts we follow, syndromes we suffer, are all made up of pieces we find floating around us. We bind them together to help us float down the river of stories, though we never quite know how far we will go, whether our knots will hold, nor where we will wash ashore.

Such is the nature of each and everyone’s narrative. Memories, dreams, images, and associations come to the fore as one momentary event is heaped one upon another, often in total disarray. Sudden insights materialize whence sensations have penetrated the very core of being. This is the dynamic of life. We shape our being as it shapes us.

The described amalgam provides a complicated palimpsest of reflection. Time frames are blurred, and sensations become skewed. This is the strange dilemma and poignant place every artist must face when inspired with an idea and the drive to create. It can be likened to reaching into space, bedevilled by the chimera of one’s mind. Artmakers are moved by forms of unique, personal reflections, phenomena which are deeply embedded in their psyche; they seek fulfilment by making their art which becomes impregnated with personal narrative. Such scripts are the subconscious ontology of one’s own journey of perception.

Essentially it is a singular and lonely road, which Bachelard (1969: 189) describes as a place where “Man, and the world are paradoxically united in the dialogue of solitude”.

But this is not the whole story. The artist’s creation is a complex package of sensations, thoughts, and signs, an intricate construct that provides but one part of the equation. Roché (2014: 21) referred to Marcel Duchamp as saying, “The artist performs only one part of the creative process. The onlooker completes it, and it is the onlooker who has the final say”.

Duchamp continues to question:

Could one make works which are not works of art - could art ever be adequately defined, because the translation of an aesthetic emotion into a verbal description is as inaccurate as your description of fear when you have actually been scared.

Each artefact is a condensed fusion, loaded with data, and should this be the case, then consideration must be given to TWO ‘triplex’ notions embroiled in the discussion. The first triplex is positioned in the title, where it is suggested that the theory is composed of two arcane concepts separated by a tangible object – vulnerability, the artefact, and its trajectory; the second triplex is a nexus of three distinct concrete, material objects – the art maker, the artwork, and the spectator. Even though each isolated unit can and does exist independently, in the case of this specific research, I urge an acceptance of an interdependence between each triplex bond, and further the argument by considering the idea of reciprocity and bonding between the units (see Figure 6).

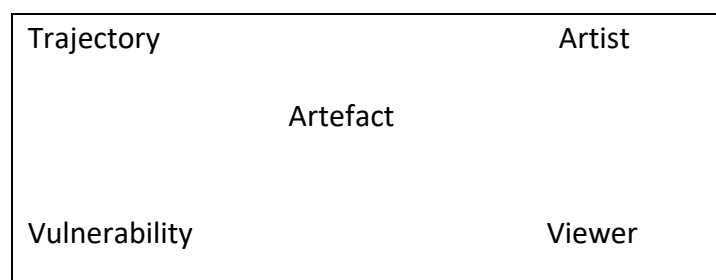


Figure 6 : Two triplex concepts, overlapped with Artefact as common denominator.

Interestingly, if this notion is defensible and if the entire argument and discussion around my speculation is appropriate (in other words- this idea of the two triplex concepts), I proffer that the wedded combination of each three-some can be likened to the very act of creation. The single and only common denominator in each triplex format is *the artefact* itself. And once the cord is cut, and the original four ‘wings’ fade into the background, the artwork emerges like a phoenix out of the ashes, an independent, singular object. It must position itself, unescorted, in space – as Levi-Strauss (Burnham:1973.71) described it: “that frozen conceptual notion of object”. Solus. Solitary and unaided it takes up its place. In discussion with Elizabeth Gunter (2020) we agreed that Merleau-Ponty’s thinking explains the exchanges, mutuality, overlaps, and interchanges between viewer and artwork, between artist and artwork, and thus between art maker and viewer, ‘a full circle shaped in reciprocity’. One can therefore extrapolate that an image, projecting a state of vulnerability, reflects our own vulnerability in the visual language of image.

The research motivates to emphasize how, by way of exchange and interchange with each spectator, a dialogue is forged, a conversation between the maker, the artwork, and the viewer. A web develops creating a circle woven and entwined around empathetic reciprocity; a mysterious wheel, within wheels completing the *gestalt*. It is **the** notion of personal exchanging and interchanging which binds and bonds this unique trilogy, becoming an interchange of unspoken intimacy; and in this case, impregnated with the notion of vulnerability.

I suggest that once the artwork is positioned as an independent unit, its soma projects its individual self with a narrative of its own. Yet I proffer that its *genesis* must be clarified to fully appreciate its creation. The memory and experience shared between artmaker, and viewer remain, enduring and steadfast. History will be recorded, its tale told in many ways. Such appraisal may be offered through opinion of the art critics, or by those involved in its making, or even by way of general gossip between friends. In its totality, the entire narrative will become integrated as part of the whole of the work, something which is strangely attached, in an arcane way, to the ‘appreciation’ (or lack thereof) of the work.

## 1.5 The Title: as Instigator\_

### Thinking and Artmaking are two *inseparable* components. Yes and No.

Thinking is a cerebral, logical thought process – a conscious awareness of information. It may be intangible, abstract, and stored in the mind, but it involves a conscious ‘thinking psyche’ to give it substance. One is reminded of the theory of Descartes (Newman in Zalta. 2019: Introduction 4.1) who opined: “Cogito, ergo sum – I think therefore I am” as being the only truth, and that “thinketh maketh the man”. Yes and no. Not everyone shares such opinion, but for some, it projects a certain resonance.

The inference that thinking and artmaking are intricately bound implies that the two inseparable components should share the same umbrella. I personally do not consider this to be a harmonious union. Artmaking happens in the gut, it is an emotional thing, and a response to a ‘*je ne sais quoi*,’ and it is accompanied by a compelling thrust to find a voice, an exit, an expression, a way, some form, through some medium – anything – other than involving a lexicon of words<sup>6</sup>. Words provide a compendium of articulated thought processes and are a form of expression that is often premediated and carefully construed. Artmaking obviously requires thought process, but only for a formula to express what the artist is trying to say – the medium and the method as it were.

Artmaking is a creative, heuristic process, it is a compulsion to capture and spawn ideas, thoughts, and feelings; it is an act which demands a certain type of prowess and fortitude. It can be said it is an act of bravery, – at times too daunting to contemplate. If this challenge be so, why do we make art? Why? Such rhetoric of questioning has resounded through the halls of time. Making artefacts and being creative are as intrinsic to our lifeblood as that of being vulnerable. These illusive phenomena are but facts of life and are said to be partly due to a yearning for kindred bonding and assured immortality. Who knows? For the most part, making is the response to a type of passion, an organic sensation which gives meaning to unexplored territory and new beginnings, resulting in artworks which often surprise even

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<sup>6</sup> Words have been used in literature, and poetry, they have been scribbled on walls, and bound in journals, but I am using the term to focus on the way words are used in argument, an articulation of a thought process where frequently artmaking has no logic, logos almost dormant.

the maker. The psychiatrist, Rollo May (1978: 4) suggested that “creativity is a necessary sequel to being... but it requires courage, courage for the creative act”, and he continues to suggest that being creative requires “the sort of social courage that has the capacity to risk oneself in the hope achieving meaningful intimacy”. The art object comes into own being as an individual creation, yet frequently verbal information is required to convey explanation or to provide understanding to complete the work and position it in time and place.

## **1.6 The Title: Words as Nomenclature.**

Words roll off the tongue as easily as a smile from the lips. When we speak, we do not think of each word per se, but the connotation and the association of each word become part of the discourse as we talk. We use words to communicate and even to impress. We write words to document and to record, to read them or to respond to others and we naturally assume that the words we use will be heard by listening ears as part of the dialogue. Words are seldom spoken into a vacuum – even words used simply for shooting the breeze, or for tossing to crowds in the winds. They are used with the express intention to be said and to be heard. But Word as Image on a surface – the visual sensation of seeing and looking at the characters, marks which are the interface between the scribe and the beholder is the subject under discussion here.

This section proposes that the idea of words written on an object or presented in some form in or on an artwork, is the focus of debate. In Paris, more than a century ago, René Magritte (1929) exhibited a small painting of a singular object, a simple pipe -a work he called, ‘*Ceci n’est pas une Pipe*’. Written on the canvas and below the single image are the scribed words. And, correctly, it is not a pipe. It is the painting of a pipe! I refer to this incident because it provides me with the treatise I have in mind. This example is a simple explanation of the conjecture I am proposing.

My hypothesis concerning the story of the pipe has led me to consider the message embedded in the title of this thesis, and to extract precisely what words mean. The



straightforward sequence of words, a phrase: *vulnerability laid bare, a dialect without utterance*, has been a veritable pandora's box for investigation; a repository and store of challenging queries.

I use the example of one of my clay sculptures, a calm static figure yet written **beneath** the wrap (illegible, now fired into the body) are the words:

(see Figure 7).



Figure 7 : Lapping-Sellars. 2021. 'I am anxious, I am tired, and I feel desperately vulnerable' Ceramic

What does this mean, how may the viewer react, can this be even remotely true? There is certainly tension and disbelief. But the real question is that what is visually perceived does not tally with what either the semblance of the body language projects, nor do the words reflect what we know to be true. It is very complicated. We associate body language, gestures, and certain signs with certain messages, and when these do not tally, there is a problem.

It is for this reason that I revisit the idea of ‘trajecting’ the notion of vulnerability: quite simply where and what is the truth? Which message is the one that we all understand? A discussion between Poerksen and Varela (Marutana & Varela. 2006:36): when Poerksen remarks that “Thinking and perceiving are understood as data processing” and to this Varela responds, “The cognitive system and the world are seen as a relation of semantic representation: The mind processes symbols”.

Cognition therefore is a form of symbol processing; but what then are words written on a surface? Are they symbols, or marks, or phrases that may either taunt or inform the viewer?

### **1.7 The Title as Agitator.**

The emergence of the questions I list above demonstrate how the narrative of this study follows twists and turns, just as one idea is resolved, another presents itself in a different guise. This is largely to do with the complexity placed firmly in the title itself. It encases a myriad of suggestion and potential. A mental image of it suggests it can be likened to a whirligig with many arms and in constant movement; a challenging and intricate package to handle and even more complicated to unwrap. But despite its firebrand status, it is, in truth, a benign and multifaceted kaleidoscope which may only be construed as an *agitator* by the faint hearted. Ongoing investigation has uncovered a study lain bare, a rabbit warren of numerous tunnels, each leading to alternative theories, fresh ideas, and exigent thought processes; all eliciting questions the answers to which exceed the scope of this study. Every human being, indeed, each traveller, is aware that, on entering a maze, there will be

moments of impasse or even a times of deadlock on the peregrination; but making art involves an act of pioneering and such exercise is a frisson of detection which paves the way of dynamic and compelling revelation and discovery.



Figure 8 : Lapping-Sellars .2021. *Evacuees at Play*. Pen & Ink



Figure 9 : Lapping-Sellars .2021. *Evacuees at Play*. Pen & Ink

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it must be stated that the Title's phrase of words has served as a prompt to facilitate the intention and perception of how such expression could and would encourage debate. And not only debate but, through its inference of association, thoughts have burgeoned fresh insights. The truth being that the search to fathom the patois projected from my work provides grist for the mill of investigation,

The intrigue to decipher marks and gestures which replace the dialogue of verbal expression lies at the foot of the study, and this first chapter closes having set the stage for exploration. It has described the way Covid-19 has afflicted the stability of the general populace and specifically engendered a conscious vulnerability in so many. Largely due to my own personal and individual nature, it has revealed my own insight of such anguish. Embedded in my being, in my subconscious, are notions of frailty, and, due to Covid-19, such feelings have become manifest by way of my artmaking and become transformed into artefacts. These in turn became veritable marks of the interchanges of my deep psyche. The research will proffer the challenge to decode such gestures in the works and will become, in fact, a way of disclosing and telling my personal history. As my being human comprehends the limitations and the strengths of being mortal, I suggest that the sequitur to this chapter requires further deliberation: Human being Human.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Human being Human

#### Introduction:

I understand the physicality of existence. I also understand that we embrace an arcane thread of ephemerality, and I emphasise such undercurrents of evanescence with the intonation of vulnerability in this study. This chapter explores its domicile: the sheer physicality of Being. Humans being humans. My discussion in this text assumes humans to be a melding of all sentience, embodying vulnerabilities and strengths, memory and experience, internalisations, and externalisations. I reiterate my explanation in the Introduction: the sense of **actual being** is an indelibly embedded part of our sentience and, specific to this study, in that of the human who is both artmaker and viewer. This chapter considers such aspects of 'being human' and its relation to the state of being vulnerable, which is further explored in the next chapter.

The entire study, after all, is a discussion around the impact of Covid-19, and the word '**Deliberation**', which permeates this chapter, is not unlike the arcane thread that meanders throughout the thesis. In this case, the term 'deliberation' focuses on Humans, humans being humans, and it provides a carefully weighed contemplation bound in a group of words that consider the way mortals, as conscious beings, provide the backdrop for examination. It is a meander of dialogue into the trapeze of people as they permeate this study. I structure the chapter as follows:

#### **2.1 The Deliberation: Human being Human**

#### **2.2. The Deliberation: Human Solitude as Dialogue**

#### **2.3 The Deliberation: Human legacy and Lineage**

#### **2.4 The Deliberation: Human Form as Muse**

#### **2.5 The Deliberation: Human Cache as Chronicle**

#### **2.6 The Deliberation: Human in Praxis**

## 2.1 The Deliberation: Human Being Human.

I propose that the sensorial-and-mind as *body-mind* facilitates embodiment as *being* (always becoming) manifest. Human beings are by nature vulnerable. A term much bandied around and frequently used in conversation, implying a conglomerate of opinions, couched in many different guises. The state of being vulnerable can range from a condition of positive well-being to a circumstance so dire that it evokes shock, awe, and often sympathy. Yet, without the presence of an-other doing the perceiving, is it self-evident, without an observer, to be recognized and appreciated? The notion queries whether it is necessary for an object state to be understood by an-other and thus validated as a condition. Inferring therefore that the crux of the matter lies with judgement of the viewer.

Each, and every, personal narrative professes to tell its own honest tale, claiming to be a bona fide notion of 'baring oneself' – or telling it as it is. However, in the light of the words above, I propose that the turn of phrase, *laid bare*, implies only a half-truth and such contention requires discussion. In essence 'to bare the-thing' is to expose or to strip away 'some-thing' from 'the-thing'. And even as 'the-thing' is uncovered, perchance revealing a helplessness, it is still intact. *It is whole and persists as a thing*. The act of laying bare is a physical gesture of exposure, but in all honesty, what has been exposed? The answer can only be the Tangible Artefact itself, and yet this object remains in its entirety, unaffected by its being stripped.

So where is this argument going? I return to my hypothesis regarding The Title as Rubric.<sup>7</sup>

The heading of 'Laid Bare' hints at inaccuracy by implication, the reason being that when the object is stripped, the complexity of its maker's personality, with all its ramifications, remain

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<sup>7</sup> See subheading 1.2 in Chapter One

Wherein I state that both insight and perception are factors which recognize signs of the ephemeral state of mind – a narrative which contains a lexicon of multilingual conversation, thoughts, emotions from every conceivable dialect. And this boils down to the one and only object embedded in this thesis. The Object itself. Looking at the object, laid bare, there are hidden are concepts formed; tiny vignettes which wove themselves into a veritable quilt of emotion, message, thoughts, associations, responses – resulting in a large cover, blanketing the entire alpha and omega of completeness A total inclusivity. And with the construct wrapped up, an arcane language, a dialect without utterance must find a voice.

deeply immersed and hidden. Accordingly, what is required, indeed demanded, is that the thing which needs to be laid bare is the convoluted mindset behind the thinking of the artmaker herself. The artist, being perceptually conscious, is subjected to a profusion of happenings, essentially extraneous to herself. The impact of each encounter is recorded and becomes intrinsically bound within the psyche. Making art, or producing an object, is invariably triggered by an emotional need to capture some sensation, and it is then that the artist be required, almost subliminally or intuitively, to wade through the profusion of recollections and skills to express the creative act. This demands an inherent propensity to make, to search for a language, one capable of arresting the sensation. And in that lies the enigma and the challenge. It is she and such genesis which must be laid bare.

This is not a psychological case study as such, but the paper does propose that the responsibility of **how** vulnerability is exposed requires investigation and it rests on the nub of the WHO, *who* it was *who* elected to see and capture the impressions of an event, how she extracted its essence, and then positioned it in an artwork. This thinking, as wording, suggests a revisit of the former treatise (see footnote 5) and a renewal of this present hypothesis dealing with sensation and embodiment.

Once the focus shifts from artefact to artmaker metanoia unfolds. The issue becomes how the state of vulnerability within the individual is positioned, and which are the triggers that prompt her vulnerability. As I said earlier, this is not a cerebral harangue, but I cannot avoid giving this area of the writing its appropriate position in the thesis. In fact, avoiding it, would be irresponsible and counter-productive for any future argument. Briefly it can be said that theorists across the spectrum have debated the notion of perception. Long before Freud and Jung were rationalising about behaviour, Aristotle and Marcus Aurelius were defining their notions on perception.

I proffer that vulnerability has its genesis in the individual's perception, in both her conscious and subconscious mind. The specific point in this study is to focus on the individual and the various conscious and subconscious prompts which may give rise to a

heightened sense of vulnerability<sup>8</sup>. This is a multi-faceted enigma, a theme which will be redefined and reconsidered from here forward and presented under a variety of subtitles. This may present yet another hydra whose symbology can be used to describe these many arcane notions and concepts, presenting in several ways. Suffice it to say, that here could possibly lie the holy grail disguised in gesture, mark, or sign. I posit that, with a slow and constant chipping away at the confluence of ideas, a grasp of the hypothesis will make more sense.

## **2.2 The Deliberation on: Human Solitude as Dialogue.**

With individualism in mind, and as basis for further exploration, I probe here the *private narrative* behind *praxis* – The Tale Unfolding, as it were. The study now turns to the maker and will appraise and elaborate on the musings of a vulnerable self. It traces the story of a journey, perhaps a trajectory, prompted by contemplation and deliberation.

It all began when the Coronavirus made world headlines, threatening global health and wellbeing and, in hindsight, it happened in a nanosecond in time. It was that rare moment when the stage, the players and the audience became one. It was a Thursday – it was March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020, and I was eyeing the news on the television. Suddenly I saw the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, formally declare a national lockdown throughout his country, the reason he gave was that the spread of the coronavirus was becoming rampant and escalating rapidly. He decided to give the thousands of resident migrants in Delhi four hours to leave and go home as the city closed its borders (Figures 10 and 11)

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<sup>8</sup> Chapter 5: 'The Marrow' affords indication of this treatise.





Figure 11 : Screen Grabs CNN News TV. 26.03.2020

Figure 10 : Lapping-Sellars 2020. *Going Home*. Ceramic

I watched the eviction of these people, they who had abandoned their habitus and cast their begging bowls aside (see Figure 12). These people. I watched and felt compelled to freeze the moment, preserving it for posterity. I sat and I watched their synchronized steps, envisaging an art piece – a horizontal ribbon of bobbing heads and bands of marching feet; quietly; slowly; silently; I pictured [my artwork](#)<sup>9</sup> unfold. (Please ensure sound is turned up).

Figure 12 : Lapping-Sellars 2020 *Discarded Begging Bowls*. Fired/Smoked porcelain.

<sup>9</sup> YouTube link Short video of *Flight out of Delhi*. Lapping-Sellars 2020

I needed to document their plight. The short video attached captures the traipse of people walking. It is a long canvas 4m x 40 cm long, drawn, stitched, and varnished. Its making was created to harness the images of acquiescent plodders as they trekked homeward, their vulnerable state captured in the abject images. The sound of the plodding feet, rhythmic and reluctant, as they traversed their road ahead.

Why? I had never been to India, I had no idea regarding their station, but I was overcome by the sight of thousands of vulnerable human beings walking, walking, compliantly walking hundreds of miles home with all their worldly goods on their heads or straddled to their backs. Their extreme abject state struck a chord in my soul. I needed to capture that moment. It was **that specific instant** which fostered a notion, becoming an idea and serving as a direct prompt for this thesis and its practice-based research. A project that I have endeavored to research, to examine, and to visualize during my time of study. I have been forced to cogitate on, debate, and discuss the idea of 'vulnerable', a sensation concealed in a gesture, and I have pondered on the state of the abject as some sort of visual representation.

The truth of this, of course, is that that described *happenstance* of 'stage, players and spectator becoming a unit' reflects my personal perception of that apparent reality.



Figure 13 : Lapping-Sellars. 2020. *Drawing for Flight out of Delhi*.

Obviously, I did not imagine the event but what I did interpret was undoubtedly a projection of my inner being – walking, walking, traipsing alongside those people, identifying with their plight, and feeling their inner desperation (see Figures 13 & 14).

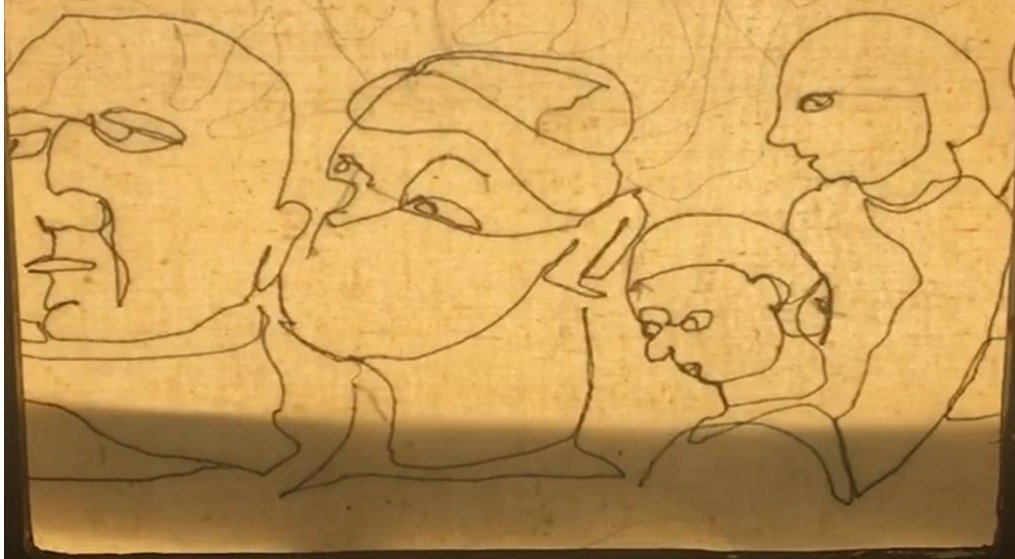


Figure 14 : Lapping-Sellars 2020. *Image of Flight*. Still from video of 4m cloth (see link in text to video, page 41)

The Coronavirus became a global pandemic very rapidly. It threatened the equanimity of the humdrum of the everyday, endangering the health and wellbeing of the world. Its backdrop set in Wuhan China became fraught with anxiety as its residents were infected and stricken to an abject state; tragically, many died. Fingers were pointed at the Chinese wet-meat markets, especially blaming the flesh of the pangolin, one of the many wild animals threatened with extinction, and now a creature infected by a bat. At present this specific accusation, relating to contamination, has yet to be confirmed. However, what is a fact is that the World Health Organization had tracked 1500 outbreaks of infectious diseases in 172 countries over a period of eight years, prior to this outbreak, and had alerted the World Bank, amongst others, of the inadequate preparedness for a possible new alternate strain of virus which could become a pandemic. (Who was listening?). I quote Honigsbaum (2020: 272):

There is a very real threat of a rapidly moving, highly lethal pandemic of a respiratory pathogen, capable of killing 50 to 80 million people and wiping out nearly 5% of the world's economy – it is past the time to act.

What is more poignant is that, in relation to the vulnerable physical condition of the population, Honigsbaum reiterates an urgency, stressing that the pandemic would likely end when 80% of the population had been infected and millions of deaths had occurred<sup>10</sup>. Had these words been heard and this warning heeded, early research for a vaccine could possibly have prevented aspects of the dire consequences experienced today.

All these facts played heavily on my mind. For a variety of reasons all was not well on this front; those endangered, hunted animal species were naturally vulnerable, people exposed to the virus were certainly vulnerable, and now, looking back, everyone had become vulnerable. Too little attention was being paid, and not enough proactivity was at the ready to harness the threat. Money, money, the *lingua franca* of trade, played a major factor in addressing such grave issues, stressing that, “Cash for the coronavirus was **precisely** what was missing in the run up to the COVID-19 pandemic” Honigsbaum (2020: 273). The news was menacing and the virus, overnight, turned into a pandemic – officially proclaimed by the World Health Organisation itself. Countries rapidly closed their borders, residents were confined to their homes, businesses were boarded up, and tragically, hospitals became the epicentre of both the ailing and the dying. Global security was under fire, and as the populations weakened, a serious vulnerability was being manifest ubiquitously.

Now, what has all this international news and factual background to do with the artefacts I am creating today, and why provide such backdrop verbiage above? I proffer that such conscious awareness of the world has been the inspiration for my creative impulse, one which forced me to make art during the spread of the Coronavirus. Bluntly put, it is for this very reason that I, as an art maker, have been compelled to contextualise my thought

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<sup>10</sup> By June 2021: over 4 million people have died and 141 million have been infected. In truth, deaths due to the coronavirus are impossible to quantify. Deaths related to obsequious causes may indirectly have their causal source due to the impact of Covid-19.

process, analysing my response system to the here and now, and giving due consideration to the current global zeitgeist. There is great suffering on this planet, much of which has changed the dynamics of human behaviour, and I am compelled to become involved and to find a way to express my thoughts in an appropriate medium.

There has been interminable debate about COVID-19, academic conversation has abounded, countless words have been written on the topic, but my paltry introduction offered here is but to serve as an *aide memoire* to hold close to your chest as we walk through the dark forest of unpredictable encounter and incalculable heartache. All my current work to date has been envisaged and executed during this lockdown, and I have begun to perceive a thread running through the defined fabric. Perhaps it has become a matrix upon which each concept has rested; all of such dis-ease is testament to the impact of a disease. My praxis is a substantiation of the what, the why, the how and the where: it registers migrants fleeing, humans dying, academics, medics and politicians expounding theories, and it documents the plight of the people. Of late, I now witness people who are coping by **reacting, responding, repatriating**; humans seeking shelter, protection, comfort. All of this is being prompted by an inner drive to adapt to an unpredictable, unprecedented global crisis. In a strange way, it has developed into a search for a method to realign the algorithm of my mind, to recalibrate my thoughts, and to find a way forward to renew an equilibrium of calm.

My strategy has been to capture the sudden diaspora of thoughts and deeds in a visual manner, harnessing the way in which humans have grappled with a type of disbandment of habitual behaviour. It is more than a year of unease with no real positive hope nor happy outcome in sight. The human psyche is hanging on a thread and remains in limbo. It is to this state of precarity that I continue to address and to figure out how to resolve my perception of such human angst.



### 2.3. The Deliberation: Human on Legacy and Lineage

My research paper and praxis both shift in tandem and are stated as a form of lineage by way of simple explanation. I am a woman who has lived a very full life and I repeat that I, like most mature women, have witnessed both extreme highs and low lows. What has, however, provided me with a mechanism of continuation throughout, is my ability to make art, and to use my medium to act as a form of expression – replacing words and sensations with malleable matter, finding the poetics of material form. Bachelard (1969: xii) has indicated that there is:

a relation of a new poetic image and archetype lying dormant in the depths of the unconscious. Through the brilliance of an image, the distant past resounds its echoes. The poetic image has an entity and a dynamism of its own.

I know and understand that the art I make is a method of communication, a way of capturing my thoughts and feelings. The concept of 'lineage and legacy' is described as in unified fashion, an assemblage of both memories and narratives which are passed from one generation to another. This idea may be considered as something daunting and may even be construed as a weighty burden of substantial responsibility, yet I proffer that this should never be an impediment for making art. It is well-known and accepted that the content of a 'legacy' is entirely dependent on its place in history. The wretched life and legacy of van Gogh is a case in point. In my humble way, I have created work which is positioned in both my writing and my artmaking, an oeuvre which has covered several years. It is my sincere hope that my work has provided a meaningful footprint for the many I have taught, and for the few who have read my words, invested in my work, and even remained interested in my thrust as an artist. My work is essentially focussed on human beings and the way they live their lives – and what they do with what they have. For this reason, my praxis often uses the human form as muse, and it is my endeavour to work with truth and integrity in the hope that this will play a role in any legacy I may leave for posterity.

## 2.4 The Deliberation: Human Form as Muse.

The human form, the face and the body have always provided me with inspiration, offering a manifold of images. They have served as inspiration, frequently providing me with a point of departure. I read psychology and became intrigued by the way people look, move, and behave. During my work in therapeutic centres, it followed that observing body language<sup>11</sup> and behaviour would be of importance as it was encouraged to focus on both physical form and mental health. My art training was broad, and I managed to acquire skills in a variety of mediums – ceramics and glaze provided one of my majors and as a result I have worked over many years with clay, with kilns, and with fire in a variety of ways. In most of my praxis I continue to use the human form as a personified force, and a muse, for my creative output.

A challenge has been to apply my observational skills for capturing a frame of mind or the mental temper of the figures I have embedded in my mind or seen on my path. Much of my work reflects such imagery, as I grapple to find the appropriate method and medium to capture my thought process. It is never an unequivocal solution, but often the creative process overrides the logic of thought. When the piece is multifaceted, the medium and its form provide fresh perception, and in the event of its being three-dimensional, the focus is not only on the relationship of the figures but the spaces between them, and the place they occupy. Position and installation, location, and milieu for an art object are all intrinsically woven into the framework of how it is perceived. This specific point provides a whole new dimension and will be investigated at length further into this study<sup>12</sup>.

Crucially I ponder on the language that emanates from an art object and how body language becomes a method of communication and point of departure. Mind-body language is a form of intermediary, or go-between, for conveying information. It speaks of sensation, it reflects ageing, it hints at the finite span of life. Levi-Strauss (Burnham1973:71) suggests:

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<sup>11</sup> The concept of body as vehicle will be investigated in due course. Paragraph 2.6

<sup>12</sup> The topic of medium will be discussed further under the heading 'Human in Praxis' p.53.

“Art mediates the most fundamental of all predicaments: the contradiction between the instinct for survival or immortality, and the realization of death’s inevitability”.

It has been over a year since the beginning of lockdown and human behaviour is changing. The severe restrictions on movement, the financial pessimism, and the lack of social engagement have all become evident in how people express their feelings in their behaviour, the way they engage, and the nature of their conversation. Uncertainty and fear still pervade everyday living, and body language reflects this. Mannerisms, movements, social encounter and even gestures have all provided signals and, as such, project a form of non-verbal communication. Many remain in a state of limbo, trepidation has arrested spontaneous gatherings whilst apprehension abounds. The facts surrounding death and burials hover like clouds of grey. News still suggests that ambulances must double up as hearses, funeral homes are stretched, and burial rites have been considerably rewritten. Painful images, observed on television, are those of the rows of tightly wrapped bodies – their toxic disease bonded in the wrappings – the figures being interned in makeshift graves, vaults of mud; deprived of gravitas and ritual. (see Figures 15 and 16).



Figure 15 : Lapping-Sellars 2020. *Burial without Ritual*. Porcelain figures lined up.





Figure 16 : : Lapping-Sellars 2020. *Burial without Ritual*. Porcelain figures imbedded into mud.

All the above has provided grist to the mill for my creations. The narrative focussing on the spread of Covid-19 has provided a chronicle of events within a specific time frame<sup>13</sup>.

Internalised personal sensation has become an interface for conveying my musings to others. My ways of making have served as tools, or as intermediaries, for communication with 'the other'; artworks projecting a form of a reverberation or echoing, images that may resonate within their very being. My praxis has become a language, '*sans dire un mot*<sup>14</sup>'. I suggest that the notion of perceptual experience involves an exchange and interchange of response or reaction – a type of reversibility. This is not only a shared dynamic between the maker and the viewer, but also a link between the artefact and the viewer, and as such the launch of a dialogue, a reciprocal discourse moving back and forth.

Can this cognitive process be described as a form of 'Innuendo' via Tacit Gaze?

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<sup>13</sup> This idea of 'chronological record' will be looked at within the discussion on Time<sup>13</sup>, Chapter Four further into the documented draft.

<sup>14</sup> Without saying a word

## 2.5 The Deliberation: Human Cache as Chronicle.

I am by nature a person who records, who writes, who draws. I am a witness, a type of archivist of things I have seen, heard and experienced. Through this past year I have continued to draw and to write; such mark making seen often as no more than scribbles and scrawls, but what became interesting to me was that, even the most benign of mark can, and will, provide a register or prompt a memory in the stream of my consciousness. It may set up a train of thoughts, associations, and interior dialogues – a glossary of mental imagery. Such denouement offers me a form of a bizarre merger of ‘that which has gone before’, and ‘that which is happening now’, and as such, may include memories which resonate of smells, or tastes, of touches or of being touched, of signs or of sounds. Things which are reminders of places I have visited, meals I have shared, people I have loved. My psyche has become a veritable treasure trove. This is substantiated by my artwork *The Pages* (see Figure 17), which is an amalgam of cut and cropped pieces of Arches paper and of table-top canvas which served as either notebook or capricious drawing surface during my artmaking this last year. Such slices were impaled on a tall metal spike, and the work titled *The Pages* is the result. The climax and finale of contemplation, and creative forging. My total praxis.



Figure 17 : Lapping-Sellars. 2021. *The Pages*. Canvas, ceramic, paper.

The argument permeating my verbal ramblings revolves around the idea that can describe the mindset and psyche of **all** human beings. This penchant and veritable ability to ‘record’, to internalise, is an authentic, honest phenomenon positioned ubiquitously, in each, and every one of us. And what is more, internalisation begins on Day One, even starting, perhaps, before we are born. Ridley (2003; 201) writes:

A child who comes into the world today inherits a set of genes and learns many lessons from experience. But she acquires something else, too: the words, the thoughts and the tools that were invented by other people far away or long ago.

The result is an amalgam of stored information. We can now claim that what accompanies us all daily is a veritable library of data to which we can add, we can subtract, we can forget, we can exaggerate and embellish. It is our own distinctive, intimate brand which makes us unique. That very cache resides in the artist **and** the spectator, in fact in all of us<sup>15</sup>. It is an uplifting, comforting, and exhilarating *non-pareil*! Scholarly cerebration and intellectual philosophies surrounding this topic of stored information have occupied academic circles for years. What I have presented, in a somewhat parochial or even pedestrian manner, is a personal view as I perceive my experience to be. In an individual way, I have considered the aspect of chronicling such information during the year of the pandemic and I realise that the artworks I have made this past year – the pieces which can and do document my perception of Covid-19 – are contemporaneous and reflexive of my personal thought-process.

At the time of making the metre high figures (see Figures 18 and 19) I was aware and deeply concerned with the seeming apathy of people, the apparent lack of direction devoid of hope for the morrow. The idea led to a series called *Humans in Limbo*, comprising of seven forms walking, walking with neither apparent purpose nor end in sight. They are unique to me and therefore contribute to my individualism. Considering the words of Lévi-Strauss<sup>16</sup>, I see my

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<sup>15</sup> I must add that what has just come to mind is that when someone shares something with some other, be it in what form – THAT level of shared information – becomes woven into our subliminal data. It penetrates our memory, and thoughts, and feelings. We absorb it as our own and can refer to it at any given time. This is a very, very complex web we weave for ourselves!

<sup>16</sup> (Levi-Strauss in Burnham.1973:71): “Art reduces the physical flow of temporal events to a mental instant, a frozen conceptual order which remains in effect as long as the work itself”

works as static conceptual objects, which can and have reduced the tide of earthly events to a mental instant. The notion of temporality appears as pertinent to the processes of art making. And the notion of repetition furthers argument of time passing.

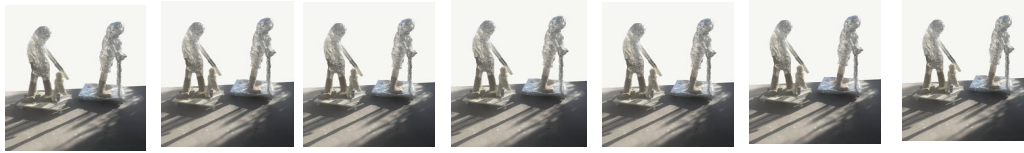


Figure 18 : Lapping-Sellars. 2020. *Human in Limbo*. Maquette on left and small-scale repeated images above as bibelots.



Figure 19 : Lapping-Sellars. 2020.

*Humans in Limbo*.: Mixed media

I relate here a narrative of a journey in time. When Hanbury-Tenison (2020: 8) was considering great journeys, he asked; “What is it that motivates mankind to set out into the unknown? It is an unashamed emphasis for exploration”. This has been my journey and constitutes my narrative in time, trusting it has sufficient integrity to serve as a chronicle of events, whereby creating a form of reciprocal exchange and understanding of this peregrination belonging to me.

## 2.6 The Deliberation: Human in Praxis.

The human creating a visual, tangible form as art object by way of medium, mark, shape, and form, gives material form to the immaterial and encodes such object with meaning.

The idea of trajecting a sign by way of an artefact is confronting; it defies logic, it posits query, it demands information, it questions reason; but this querulous chatter has already been discussed in previous paragraphs and at length. The issue remains that objects are anomalies in themselves; creations that require pensive observation and a certain understanding of time and place. It entails, indeed demands, a constant chipping away at the confluence of ideas and the idea that was mooted in paragraph 2.1. the discussion centered around the notion of vulnerability being embedded in the medium, and will not only require a decoding of signs, but will also consider the decisions accorded to material, form, and all manners and means related to the praxis. Could these issues mirror the way vulnerability is laid bare? Exposed? And to what end will this 'tell-all' expose the very substance of the artmaker? Considering these questions could be very revealing and in the next chapter the notion of vulnerability, as manifest in my art, enjoys focus, positioning itself as an almost reflexive exposure of the artist's unconscious, revealing as a visual and therefore newly legible language as representation of the innermost planes of sentience. From this, the following questions flow: How does one read visual representation? What are the Signs?

The research idea was formulated during lockdown when an underlying thread between the notion of vulnerability and the images of my art emerged from me, but aside from that, can the same be said for the viewer's experience of my work? Such spectator opinion of my work implies that the art I was making could **enable and encourage** a type of inter-generational, inter-era transmission.

This conjecture led to three pillars that may uphold this study:

- Firstly, the imagery and forms that constituted my 'lockdown art.'
- Secondly, the notion of vulnerability.
- Thirdly, the concept of socio-cultural transmission from era to era, from generation to generation.

The sequitur within the title suggests that the iconography of such artefacts, those which I am creating, could provide a form of trajectory which, inter alia, would reveal, expose, and lay bare a state of being vulnerable. This all would present in the disguise of muted message and stress that everyone has a singular viewpoint – ‘as many people, as many views,’<sup>17</sup> and that to intellectualize separate perception of muted language, by way of an intimate object, is the challenge.

Earlier under 2.1<sup>18</sup> above, the concept of a certain misnomer was mooted, and I still stand by that conjecture. What I have concluded is that the meta-theory I proposed remains in place. However, what follows is the concept of praxis, the actual making of the object(s) and how they came into being. I have already intimated that, during the epidemic, the vulnerability of human beings became manifest and made a deep impression on me, and it is to the verbal articulation of impression that I now turn. I was deeply moved within and felt compelled to find the correct materials that could reflect the sensation I was experiencing.

My choice of materials. I knew that I could not use clay or ceramic – it was, inexplicably, too permanent, just wrong. I had in mind something like cloth, a woven fabric. Many years ago, I had seen the Bayeux Tapestries in Normandy, France. I recalled the embroidered cloth, 70 meters long, depicting the events leading up to the Norman conquests (see Figure 20). The idea of a story, a narrative depicting events as they unfolded in a timeframe, embedded in sequential manner, was of interest to me. It depicted a story, and told of people’s lives, and the fabric and thread, the cloth’s warp and weft, became part of the depictions, part of the story, resulting in a single unit as one art-piece.

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<sup>17</sup> *‘quotquot homines tot sententiae’*

<sup>18</sup> 2.1: ‘I proffer that vulnerability has its genesis in the individual’s perception, in her conscious and subconscious minds’.





Figure 20 : Section of the Bayeux Tapestry. Normandy, France 11thC.

(Embroidery 70 m long).

Although I had seen paintings on the walls of the pyramids, the cloth and thread resonated in my mind. When, in 2020, I watched the masses of people walking out of Delhi,<sup>19</sup> my memory of those French tapestries emerged from way back in my life, a long time before.<sup>20</sup> Such deep-seated imagery in one's memory forms a type of meta-concept; the idea relating to a theory of ephemeral sensations floating in the cloud of the subconscious, providing, and becoming the very epitome of palimpsest at its most perfect self.

## 2.7 Human in Praxis Human

The study which harkens back and forth in time, now positions the first artwork I made at the onset of the pandemic in March 2020. The *Flight out of Delhi* was an embroidered and painted cloth, four metres long, a piece which is, in fact, a veritable palimpsest of my own life. I have experienced similar feeling of leaving, of being left, of parting, of being bereft. I am certain that just as that Bayeux image emerged from my subconscious, so did that feeling of lamentation materialize when I saw those wretched migrants leaving Delhi, their home. All one and the same.

<sup>19</sup> *Flight out of Delhi*, the video, contains a soundtrack that captures the interminable sensation of TRUDGE – a metaphor for life's journey. p. 41.

<sup>20</sup> Such imagery overlaid one memory over another. A palimpsest indeed.

I hazard that the same type of imagery has duplicated itself repeatedly in my work in 2020 when I saw the first South Africans being repatriated on a mercy flight from Brazil. I watched them, walking, walking, burdened as they returned. I have seen children leave and not return and I understand the deep longing they experience for home. The large installation piece I created is called *Repatriation* (1.5 x 1 m) composed of a similar stitched cloth. Below the cloth, small porcelain people reiterate the stitched figures. Walking. Walking. (see Figures 21 and 22). These figures, drawn and modelled, are frozen in time, as they walk sequentially, one behind the other, they are reflecting a time frame, linear time by their simple act of walking, one behind the other. And this notion of time is addressed in chapter four.



Figure 21 : Lapping-Sellars. 2020. *Repatriation*.

Stitched and painted Cloth, Ceramic figures. Wooden frame.



Figure 22 : *Repatriation*. Details, back and front. Stitched/Painted Cloth.



**Conclusion**

The pages in this chapter consider the role played by human beings, their contributory parts played both as interpreters and conduits. Within the study, the human factor provides an evaluation of the meaning of the words in the title, but it also adds ancillary support to define where Covid-19 fitted into the entire exercise. The human element is characterised as a form of channel to persuade the deciphering of this arcane thread. The following chapter considers the ambit of inquiry and opinion.

## **CHAPTER THREE.**

### **Coordinating Opinion**

#### **Introduction.**

In this chapter I consider practice-based theory, presented both as human opinion and the interpretation thereof. In the previous chapter the individual stance is singular and unique, and by valuing independent appraisal, Chapter Three aims to contribute to the overall study by drawing on the work of three artists who, in one way or another, have made work which projects signs of vulnerability or a sense of liminality. Since the previous chapter also raised the notion of temporality in the creative act, this chapter closes with a reminder and the hint that this study is an ongoing narrative definitively related to time, Chronos, nemesis or not.

If humans can think, verbalize, and mouth words, they will expound opinion. Judgement is the ipso facto of being human. This chapter continues the study into the muted word, considering the notion of opinion, that which is not always muted, and yet remains the veritable base of mortal sentiments. The prologue proffers a personal view, a fact that presents as an individual stance, both singular and unique. The structure of this chapter flows as follows:

#### **The Prologue**

#### **The Arcane**

#### **Preface**

#### **3.1. Coordinating Opinion on: Practice-Based Theory**

#### **3.2 Coordinating Opinion on: Artefact as Protagonist**

#### **3.3 Coordinating Opinion: Artists making Art during the Pandemic**

#### **3.4 Coordinating Opinion: Pertinent Theories and Opinions**

### What does 'Being Vulnerability' imply?

#### The Prologue: *In Mea Sentia*.

For the past year I have been confronted with, and obsessed by, the question above. I have become acutely cognizant, painfully aware, and even somewhat crazed by this word: Vulnerability. I have spent an inordinate amount of time wondering how it could be linked to either living or dead things, some strange notion by way of memes or signs reflecting its condition. I have read books, scanned through articles, looked at images, and listened to many points of view. Our state of being vulnerable proffers nought but the capacity to be harmed in some way. As such vulnerability, I have come to realise is *nothing*, nothing, and yet its malady is profound. Adjectives like ugly, hungry, weird are also *nothing* really, they too are just words, explicit and arcane terms to boot, words which conjure up perceptual sensations, but not one is either synonymous nor appropriate for sharing the stage where vulnerability resides.

To my mind, there are a few things vulnerability is not. It is neither joyous nor celebratory, neither beautiful nor admirable: in fact, none of these positive, ephemeral terms would apply. It is also not a condition one wants to feel. Being harmed or feeling frail is not a sensation one voluntarily seeks, and when some '*thing*' appears vulnerable, one can surely assume that some form of duress has been involved – something which has disturbed the state of equanimity. This implies the presence of a form of foreign malaise, a negative caprice, one capable of inflicting pain somehow. If this argument holds sway and if it poses acceptable discourse, the sequitur to this argument can position the current threat of malaise – Covid-19 the global pandemic – at the forefront of disorder and dis-ease, creating sufficient threat to cause harm to every human being.

Covid-19 struck, its toxic presence and clear association with the viral spread became a reality, and those affected by the disease were rendered automatically vulnerable. The virus has been a silent, sinister, invisible threat, a bug that can settle on anything we feel or touch and can permeate the very air we breathe, threatening our healthy bodies and heightening our state of being morbidly vulnerable. The Coronavirus is *genetic material encased in protein*, a bug. On its own as a **virus**, it can accomplish *nothing*, and to be effective it needs

to enter a living thing to perform its only function, *which is to replicate*. In fact, researchers now debate whether this virus is even alive! Such pragmatic truth is disturbing. It implies once again that an ‘arcane’ element of intrigue comes into play, an invisible contagion that can kill. The further we delve into this complex situation, this thesis becomes more and more charged with discarnate theories and ephemeral notions lacking substance.

### **The Arcane. *C’est partout!*<sup>21</sup>**

In a more obscure yet significant way, vulnerability can be described as a dyad – a binary concept that consists of two elements. Being vulnerable implies that one party has been incapacitated in some way by something or someone, resulting in a hapless state implicating an-other. Like a virus, it is intangible, it is *nothing* unless it becomes manifest in another thing (a type of dupe of the virus?). Thus, another **thing** is integral to incriminate **a state of vulnerable** itself, and vital for its manifestation.

All the above must be noted for the simple reason that Vulnerability is *nothing* without invocation and provocation. It serves as a defence mechanism to protect against harm. Very well. If that is the case, then perchance the way forward would be to decrypt and to harness the concept by looking at what it is NOT. The sensation of happiness gives rise to outward displays of joy, evoking laughter, wide open arms, and a smiling countenance. On the other hand, the state of vulnerable is projected as subdued, crestfallen, and even decrepit. The abject and forlorn experience a form of melancholia and will eventually seek refuge or support of some sort, usually involving dialogue. Only by communicating, would it be possible to muster help and restore a secure state of equanimity, and by communicating through dialogue I imply sound – **verbal utterance**. A shout or a scream. I suggest that affirmation of a vulnerable state requires a second party to be involved, either by way of hearing a sound, perceiving a gesture, or catching an utterance. It is an acknowledgment of an abject state. In short, **the abject needs a voice**<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> It is everywhere, in every surround.

<sup>22</sup> The concept of the abject is defined earlier in Chapter one, 1.1, p 24.

The sequitur to this argument is positioned in subjective fashion, querying whether my artworks do, in fact, have a voice in any way at all, and should they possibly even need one. The debate questions whether the objects I have made and successfully positioned on the podium of criticality – these works of mine – are acknowledged for their gravitas, their worthiness, and validity by virtue of the opinion of an-other? These pieces I made to harness my own angst, and which, by default, became embedded with signs vulnerability and of frailty? Has my intent, my compulsion to create, had impact? If so, I would consider my work is only of substance if, and when, each installation is viewed. Will the resulting opinion register a type of emotion from the ‘other’, affirming that a heightened awareness of the abject state caused by Covid-19, the plight, and its frailty, is apparent? I further my argument and question whether I am compelled to question and to cogitate on the notion of *verbal and vocal explanation*. I ask whether, despite the images being potentially interesting or maybe even powerful, I must know whether they will require some sort of explanation to position them firmly in the camp designated for interpretation.

So, to double-back to the opening question, ‘What is this thing called vulnerable?’ I believe that, simply by looking at someone or something, it is well-nigh impossible to recognise vulnerability, nor is it beyond doubt that that composed exterior is not under duress, something which can be destroyed in seconds! One looks and ponders, and demands, “What is vulnerable? How do you know? Can you penetrate and harness the vaporous ether where vulnerability resides?”.

Does this all come down to Opinion?

## Preface

Debate continues around the nature of vulnerability – this strange intangible phenomenon embedded in an inanimate object – and the incessant contemplation on how it can be mobilized and fully appreciated. Yet it remains a by-product and not the focal point of this thesis. This probing review persists that it is a **Study** whose substance is practice-based research, and to this end, its cornerstone is the **Artefact** the principal figure of the narrative.

This chapter examines Opinion, scrutinizing the ongoing hunch that IDEA centring on *vulnerable as a sensation, encasing signs of messaging* is embedded in each artefact. The tangible object remains the focus of the study, occupying central position, yet the review will tentatively consider scholarly writing which debates how societal sensations and signs are perceived and discussed. The intention is to investigate diverse standpoints of thought, those whose speculation may throw light on the topic at hand. However, it must be stressed that such critique is not an investigation into erudite, in-depth philosophical studies as such. Instead, it revolves around the notion of how the artefact is perceived and appraised. Contemplation is ongoing with pertinent thoughts assisting in interpretation, but such ruminations remain as individual philosophies, teachings which belong to their authors. Such appropriate musings and mentation are imperative to heed and embrace – anything that will serve to enlighten and promote deeper understanding. Nevertheless, in the long run, it is ultimately the devoir of the student who must be held accountable for such exegesis.

### **3.1... Coordinating Opinion: Practice-Based Theory.**

At this stage it would seem pertinent, indeed imperative, to investigate what is implied by a practice-based research, and how, as such, it impacts on the both the writing and the artmaking of the student. The tenet of such exploration requires *reflection*, particularly in the light of the fact that the artefact will play the pivotal role in the narrative and will remain the mainstay throughout. The prime focus is to understand and harness whether the *making* of an article, something totally original, can and will contribute to the quantum soup of knowledge. Indeed, can it become a significant, prototypical object, a thing when scrutinised and discussed, will have the capacity to offer novel ideas and techniques to this phantom of enlightenment? Whichever way it is construed and constructed, the emphasis on *the making as such* prevails. Figures 23-26 are products of my making, and their *raison d'être* has provided the silent voice of frailty (a personification of vulnerability?). The vessels are jugs, visual metaphors that have no use and contain nothing, and yet the images project the idea of disintegration and dissipation. The ceramic substance has been fired to a point

when the body and surface are bonded into a mass of volcanic matter, a molten mass from which there is no return.



Figure 23 : Lapping-Sellars.2021 *Libation Vessels*. Ceramic

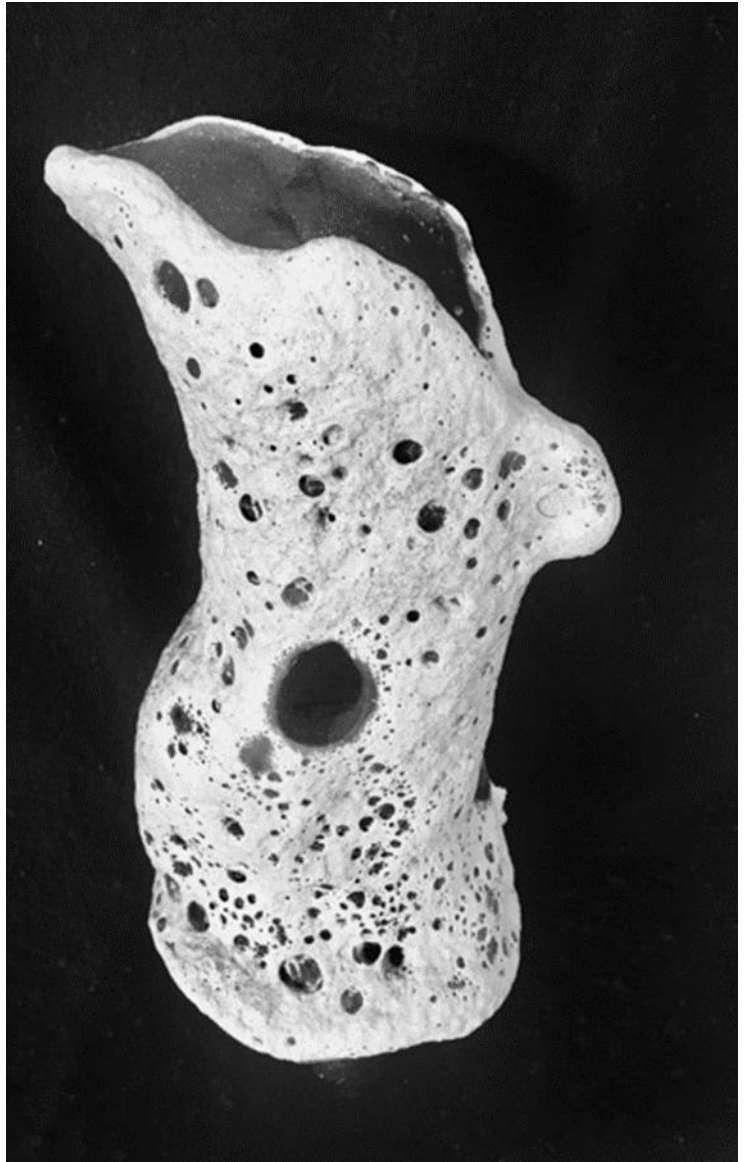


Figure 24 : Lapping-Sellars.2021 *Libation Vessels*. Ceramic





Figure 26 : Lapping-Sellars.2021

*Libation Vessels. Ceramic*



Figure 25 : Lapping-Sellars.2021

*Libation Vessels. Ceramic*



Primarily, the creative process is the linchpin of the research, and, by way of its outcome, it can provide a type of narrative of innovative interest. Each artefact will become the fruit of both physical and intellectual endeavour, and through it, independent authenticity will encourage the cognizance of something new and different to the said quantum soup. It is for this reason that attached to the practical research is the adjunct of a written thesis which is hidebound to follow the thinking behind, and progress of, the making of the various objects. Integrally woven into this dissertation will be the reflection of scholarly ideologies and doctrines, apposite to the work being produced. This here will be a modest scattering of opinion as the spectrum of philosophy at hand is boundless.

### **3.2 Coordinating Opinion: Artefact as Protagonist.**

The interminable focus of all the attention continues to stress that this is a practise-based research and, as such, holds sway. It is for this reason that the following chapter remains focussed on the art object as the central component and the mainstay of the thesis. Concurrent to the formulation of such reasonable thinking during this time, I have been incessantly active creating my artworks – objects prompted by the pandemic. The compulsion I have experienced has been directly involved with the idea of *capturing thought* as written word and, at the same time, trying to *arrest sensation* in some sort of material form. It has become a driving force *every single day*. I am certain that many artists around the world have felt a similar desperate need, during Covid, to express their thoughts and feelings while lockdown thwarted behaviour and constricted their freedom. Further into this document, I consider some of such artworks created by others. All of them prompted by the compulsion to make, irrespective of the zeitgeist of adversity – or because of it!

My personal artmaking has centred around: *The Artefact and my response as Human during Covid*. The study in the second chapter describes my making and has, in some detail, focussed on the prompts and the protocol, materials and methods, foibles and feelings. This all must be viewed in context as a manifestation of the *maker* herself, but the research will remain focussed on the stance and essence of the Artefact and its specific *individual* make-up; in fact, the very object itself?

This material object is composed of its own form; its own physical self; it contains its unique personal record, with every mark, and gesture employed to bring it into being, that which becomes its very material, tangible self – its framework and **Being** in fact. *It began as nothing*; it was but an idea in a vacuous ether. Its conception and embryonic development nevertheless mirrored a complex amalgam of cogitation and abstraction. Its genesis began as nothing, and, not unlike human conception, it took time and total dependence on its maker to come into being. But once the time was right, it broke loose and became itself – The Tangible Artefact – independent of its maker, its presence as a separate entity severed from all ties, capable of being viewed as a thing on its own, with its own unique language and made of its own unique material.

Therefore, all who viewed it would see it as a *thing*, The Thing, a separate unit evoking opinion and perception outside of self; viewers would offer opinion and perception relating to The Thing's existence *as its unique presence*, and as such it would become part of their independent consciousness, and personal thoughts related to it. When Heidegger (1971: 404-408) talks of the character of The Jug in his lecture on The Thing, he refers to the nature of the jug, which when released from its maker, must be self-supporting and capable of prospering as an independent unit. Clay can fashion a seemingly functional vessel, but the void within the container is what provides its function of utility, making it use-full. (Heidegger 1971: 404-408). Heidegger refers to the space inside the jug whereby, "Usefulness comes from what it is not"<sup>23</sup>. (See Figures 27 and 28)

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<sup>23</sup> The space, the jug's emptiness, that the walls of the jug enfold or encircle.



Figure 27 : Lapping-Sellars 2021 *Libation Vessel*. Ceramic



Figure 28 : Lapping-Sellars.2021 *Libation Vessel*. Ceramic

I consider it appropriate, in both instances to attach this concept to the artefact under discussion. Some-thing which also contains a vacuum, a type of ephemerality in space, emanating an arcane language, pregnant with meaning. The outward appearance may dominate space, but it is the **tacit narrative** that serves to give each prime mover a meaningful place in the bigger picture. Artworks created during Covid-19 are the outcome of artists expressing their creative impulse, and as such, their work. Such making will provide artworks that become beacons to provide narratives as study for future historical studies. There has been a plethora of art produced since the epidemic, and the next section intends to discuss a few pertinent points a very small sample, which may reveal insight into such private thinking.

### 3.3. Coordinating Opinion: Artists making Art during the Pandemic.

I mentioned the term plethora in the paragraph earlier, and that, in fact, is an understatement when trawling the internet searching to see the type of artworks that had been made during Covid. This will look briefly at imagery, then discuss process and material, using words of the artists to seek clarity on intention.

The Washington Post recently asked readers to share their creations during the pandemic, and *this* promoted an abundance of pieces from many different countries and from all age groups. It appeared that the traceable thread running through the work was some form of expression related to vulnerability in its copious forms. Much of the work was prompted by loneliness, isolation, quarantine, darkness and even meditation surrounding death. Several pieces depicted scenes of everyday life, but the figures appear isolated, faces masked, exhausted doctors bent double, and lives appearing fractured. A variety of materials were used, often being confined to what was available, paper cut-outs, fractured mark making, disparate combinations of paint and collage – just work– work that was produced of every size and shape. What I gleaned from this cross section was simply the frantic need to be creative and to make something to occupy *the space in the vacuum of the mind* which the pandemic had caused. Undoubtedly this small sample is a minute microcosm of a much, much larger volume of work which no-one will ever see. Journals and diaries became the locale for intimate reflection and private confessions. People who have suffered deeply would more than likely have resorted to this type of refuge.

### 3.3.1. Edmund de Waal



Figure 30 : Edmund de Waal. 2014. *Transient Haiku*. Porcelain

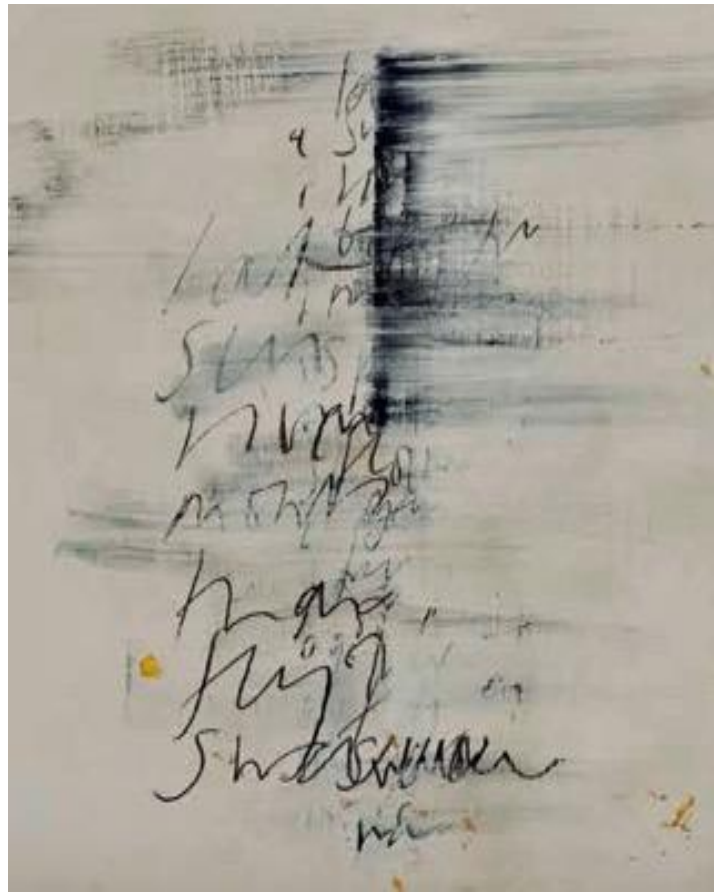


Figure 29 : Edmund de Waal. 2014. *Detail of Transient Haiku*. Porcelain.

The idea of transient, ephemeral messaging embedded in tangible artworks must consider the artworks of Edmund de Waal. (See Figures 29 and 30). His work resonates with much of the discussion on arcane messaging. De Waal is a ceramist working in London who spent time in Japan in 2014. He became involved with Haiku, a form of Japanese poetry; poems of but seventeen syllables – a group of poetic wording which would provide a succinct form of exquisite simplicity and profound truth locked into a brief passage. De Waal spread thick white porcelain slip on the surface of a piece of wood and then he incised through the surface with a bamboo nib, copying a poem. A short while later, he would spread yet another layer of porcelain on top of this, and then copy another poem, continuing to write, layer upon layer of Haiku, one blending into the other, until a veritable palimpsest of words and images became one. The resultant artwork is present, existent but confined to both



intangible, indecipherable, and arcane dialect. The clay was wet, and runny, and the words dissolved into the softness and then disappeared.

This was a solitary, private and intimate act of making marks in clay, yet the work's very nature was so fugitive and vulnerable that the words simply dissolved into the ether. Soft sounds. This rendition did not happen during the epidemic; however, I believe that reference to it could provide a powerful metaphor for much of what has been happening during this past year. Such has been the transitory nature of life during lockdown – sensation, desire, pain, and sadness all written on the winds. Gone.

### 3.3.2. Alison Schulnick

In the case of Allison Schulnick, a New York painter, I read<sup>24</sup> that she considers vulnerability to position itself in the guise of something soft and feminine, a fragile condition to be framed and targeted, yet remaining something both sturdy and strong. Her canvasses are bold and big, her mark making fearless endorsement. She hosted an exhibition in 2016, a show entitled *Vulnerability Could be the New Stoic*. Her collection took the form of a group of paintings, oils and mixed media, canvasses of very thick impasto, termed as, “work in a state of flux”. Paint that appeared morphing, dripping, and melting across the canvasses. Schulnick says, “Today, it’s too limiting to just see stoicism as sole markers of empowerment. Vulnerability could be the new stoic. ‘Weakness’ in Sadness is just as important as dignity”<sup>25</sup>. I question how she sees stoicism related to power, but I believe that she is equating the idea of stoic as being stolid and strong, coping with all aspects of the state of being vulnerable and thus sadness does not reduce its person to a weakened state.

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<sup>24</sup> <https://hyperallergic.com/326685/vulnerability-could-be-the-new-stoic-paintings-by-Allison-Schulnik/>

<sup>25</sup> Quote: Allison Schulnick Exhibition, Catalogue. <https://hyperallergic.com/326685/vulnerability-could-be-the-new-stoic-paintings-by-Allison-Schulnik/>



Figure 31 : Allison Schulnick.2016. *Wolf* Oil on canvas

### 3.3.3. Anna Buckner

I have followed an artist Anna Buckner, who is a visiting professor at Michigan State University. Her work stands in stark contrast to the work of De Waal and Schulnick in terms of medium, technique, and style, but in terms of concept they hold similarities mainly concerning the notion of vulnerability. Her exhibition (2017) was titled, *Exploring Vulnerability Through Materials*<sup>26</sup>. In her catalogue, she focusses on a term 'liminality' described as:

The quality of ambiguity or disorientation that occurs in the middle stage of a rite of passage; one on the threshold twixt behind and before, a place where nothing is clear and yet everything is important. A barely perceptible notion which exists as *in-between* as in the liminal state between life and death.

It is to this end that she makes her art; a place where she describes her creations as pieces in "the balance of existing in a liminal state which is both vulnerable and precarious". Her

<sup>26</sup> <https://artmazemag.com/anna-buckner/>



work for the exhibition *Exploring Vulnerability Through Materials* employs old pieces of fabric and stretchy material, each with its history immersed and woven into the threads, cloth that is soft, flexible, and torn. Fragments of stuff that has been stowed and stored, filtered, and found, tatters which she pieces all together under the semblance of quilting, but the process she employs is entirely her own. She pieces and pulls, severs, and stretches until the configuration is to her liking. I venture to suggest that she perceives vulnerability in the weathered material matter and throughout the process of her making, the delicate frail fibres register both vulnerability and her term '*liminality*'. In such a way her efforts uncover and restore their character, whilst introducing and spawning this strange, ephemeral idea of transition. Pieces of rag realigned, restored, and reinstated (See Figure 32). This idea of 'chronological record' will be looked at within the discussion on Time in Chapter Four..



Figure 32 : Anna Buckner. 2017.  
*Something about that tree. Fabric.*

What I have come to realize is that the word 'vulnerable' is a stable descriptive term to 'mark' a condition, while marking vulnerability in visual form is more fluid, leaving room for augmentative interpretations. As a word, it positions itself in the form of something which is non-static, unutterable. As image or form it is variable, it is fluctuating, it registers distress, and any 'thing' of tangible substance could be made to seem vulnerable. From a new-born

infant to an Olympic athlete, from the impact of climate change on the wildlife, to the coral reefs off the coast of Queensland. Everything can be destroyed therefore all things are vulnerable (all except bones!)<sup>27</sup>.

The artworks described above emanate an arcane language. They may be the work of but three art makers, a microcosm in eternity, but what lingers is a haunting sense of 'something lost', 'something having been' or 'something in the air'. There is a subliminal longing to return to wholeness; a subconscious need to establish the stable condition of equilibrium, stability as positioned in the centre of the curve of the pendulum's swing. Throughout there is the notion reflecting *an existent* that is not sayable. It is just a feeling, a sensation; they are objects which project information pertaining only to the objects themselves. Perchance it is here that, embedded is a vortex of intrigue, lies something ephemeral to contemplate. It is the idea of the repositioning or realignment of inorganic matter whereby one state of compound matter is transformed to another with by way of heat. (See Figures 33 – 36. P.75).

Berger (1984:15) writes of the demise of his friend who has been cremated, belonging now to the past and he refers to ashes.

Physically his body, simplified by burning the element of carbon, re-enters the physical process of the world. Carbon is the prerequisite for any form of life, the source of the organic. I tell myself these things, not in order to concoct a specious alchemy of immortality, but in order to remind myself that it is my view of time which is being remorselessly examined by death.

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<sup>27</sup> Throughout history bones have provided information. Archaeologists, palaeontologists, indeed all those who seek clarity to comprehend and chronicle the past, look at bones. They examine them, delve into their placement, and debate the data embedded in osseous matter. It is for this reason that bones have become an intrinsic part of this research, albeit not from an osteologist's point of view. My study uses bones as metaphor for arcane imaging and obsequious association, for the very shape of bones, and all facts associated with bones. And I use bones when fired as a source of calcium, Chapter 5 investigates this. What is Bred in the Bone.

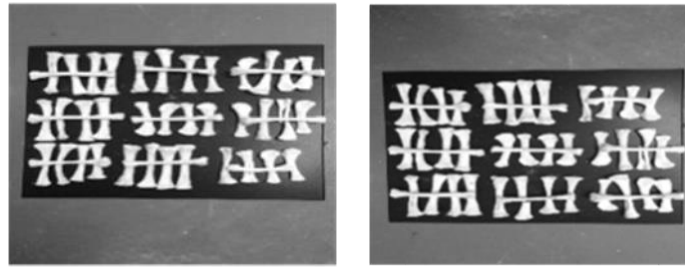


Figure 36 : Lapping-Sellars.2021. *Bones as tally*. Fired Bones, Wax.



Figure 34 : Lapping-Sellars. 2021 *Bones*. Fired to ash to make Glaze.



Figure 35 : Lapping-Sellars 2021 *Kiln Firing*. Bones to make Glaze.

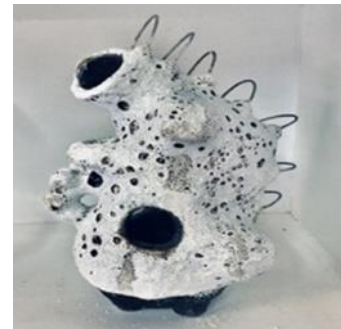


Figure 33 : Lapping-Sellars 2021 *Ceramic Vessel with Bone Ash Glaze*.

### 3.4. Coordinating Opinion: Pertinent Theories and Opinions.

The attempt to coordinate opinion is possibly a task for the gods – as many minds, as many thoughts, as many opinions. And rightly so. In fact, so rightly so that it is indeed the very fundamental essence of human behaviour and its prerogative and entitlement to be so. At the very outset of this thesis the title and the adjunct phrase proffered the notion of both a baring and a projecting of the arcane. Once all the transient thoughts are captured and the describing words (as in adjectives) are employed, the total idea belongs solely to the mouther. It is she who is with opinion and thoughts personal to her. Wherefore, this writing snakes and spirals, twists, and turns, voicing thoughts in a helix of images flung to the wind. It is stuff devoid of substance, yet laden with whispers of innuendo, residing in the vacuous state within each living individual. And then, by expressing their shared stories, their narratives will become resident in the other!

## Conclusion

This study remains focussed on the art object, a tangible thing created by its maker; a single unit which arose from the strength of manifold memories and ingrained apprehension. Information planted in her consciousness and acquired skills. Each production rose from the ashes like a phoenix. A thing with 'presence' offering the ability to instigate academic judgment and to perform as a trafficker of ideas. Its success or failure dependent on each viewer.

Fundamental truths of the world involve unsayable processes, claiming that nothing is either fixed nor static as the universe is bound essentially to the law of Cause and Effect – the ephemeral workings of nature itself. As esoteric as this may sound, the truth is that this is what purposeful living in all its forms is about. This is life and Man and his Opinion belong solely to him, and at the time of his demise, all that he is dies, with him.

All my words, my opinions and my transactions with the universe are reflected in the words written in the study and have created truisms for the reader to accept or to reject. However, there is undeniably one truth which permeates it all. It is a silver cord which traces and permeates the variety of paths pursued, the maelstrom of ideas explored. The persistent candour of validity is distilled as one unified notion, and that is the sincere attempt to harness the verity of ***Perception as being Fugitive***.

All these words hint of an alternative reality, something which is intangible yet harbouring niggling truths. And the narrative continues as the study pursues the ephemeral concept of Time.

## CHAPTER FOUR.

### Time: The pendulum as chronometer

#### Introduction

The image of a pendulum, the sound of its sway, and its swing back and forth, conjures evocative memories. These are sights and sounds encoded in the mind of a child whilst watching as the thin pendulum in the clock moves from side to side. It resonates with the individual's perception of time. Deep-seated subconscious sensations tell of present time, and of time passing. The very word **time** is bandied about being used umpteen times each day; it is ingrained in our conscious state of being. It is to this end that this chapter considers the pendulum as a metaphor for the shifting of time, and the chronometer as an accurate measure of time. In the case of this study, it is about the onset of Covid and the pursuit of its impact on our time.

#### 4.1 Parenthesis

#### 4.2 The Pendulum and the Pivot

##### 4.2.1 Time

#### 4.3 The Pendulum as Chronometer

##### 4.3.1 The Faces of Time

##### 4.3.2 The Historian in Time

##### 4.3.3 Sequential Time in Art

##### 4.3.4. Linear Time

#### 4.4 Conclusion

#### 4.1 Parenthesis.

At this stage into this study, it would seem appropriate to halt, to stop, and to arrest **all wording**; to reflect and to ruminate on what has been said, and to strategize the blueprint ahead. Essentially it is important that exigency enforces a return to the title **again and again** – and yet, for no other reason, than to look at the provenance of this thesis – just how it all began. The title undertook to pursue the vapour trail of an idea, to investigate a concept that seemed chimerical. It was structured as a group of words wrapped up in a multifaceted insinuation of innuendo.

*Vulnerability laid bare, a dialect without utterance:*

*the pursuit of an arcane thread of liminality.*

The title, each separate word or sub-phrase, vulnerable (the condition), naked (the description), the arcane (the indefinable as the message), is burdened with relevance. That said, the debate continues to remain squarely at the feet of Vulnerability whose static condition during Covid has been rumbled. This is true. Yet this ongoing state of frailty, is not only susceptible to change, but is predictably unstable, and entirely subjected to extraneous events over time. Prompted by scrutiny and close appraisal of this wording, the reader and the viewer may become overwhelmed by countless, unfathomable notions of interpretation. What exactly is being suggested? What does this all mean? Why? There are, if truth be told, no clear-cut answers to such inquiry. Period. This entire thesis attempts to harness the many thoughts surrounding the topic and it has painstakingly unfolded as an exercise in addressing these legitimate questions; a way to encourage discussion and to register provocative thoughts.

Earlier chapters have provided groundwork for this chapter, groundwork that here becomes an amalgamation of thoughts, explanations, reflections and even opinions; all of which target the hypothesis. Included in the title, almost as an afterthought, is the whisper, the subtle suggestion containing an idea which hints of something impalpable – ‘*a dialect without utterance*’. The muted symphony. A language with neither sound nor lexicon. When something is **not** said, it does not mean that it has **no voice**. It is simply silent, yet still, warranting a definitive explanation: in this case, *in the form of art*. Although mostly regarded to be a candle in the wind, the very nature of art leaves it wide open to interpretation – by whomsoever is elected to join the ongoing debate. The entire research is dependent on **opinion**; the perception and interpretation of another party whose thinking from the viewer’s perspective is extraneous to the artist and the artwork. Yet, the spectator, or arbiter, is automatically linked into the whole art experience and is integral to the entire medley. The total exercise involves a title, which is a collection of disparate terms, and three separate entities, the artmaker, the artwork and the arbiter, who, all in unison, have become one integral unit in time, the entire module being inexplicably bonded over an appropriate *period*. Equally important is the fact that what I write and what the arbiter

understands are, in fact, two languages. What I **think** and what they **hear**, in fact, do seldom align as one.

Despite all the brooding and mentation above, the study must now be realigned and focussed on an overriding force, a timeous factor which presents as something more complex and even more arcane. It is the prevailing notion of TIME, an enigmatic force, which appears to be a vague and continuous process of events and existences, an irreversible succession from the past to the present, to the future<sup>28</sup>. It has even been suggested that it could be something measured by a single individual's perception of time and duration of a happening in time. The idea of time can be described as a system for measuring how *one event either precedes or follows another*. This is something tangible and visually acceptable. On the other hand, time can be perceived as an unfathomable commodity, and an intangible force. **Some thing outside of the thing** itself. Berger (1984:10) suggests:

We are always between two times: that of the body and that of consciousness. Hence the distinction made in all cultures between body and soul. The soul is first, and above all, the locus of another time.

The study considers the baring of the artefact positioned in time and space, seeking out *the appropriate choreography of ambience*, or appropriate description, for the perfect **locus**. A place where the object and its arcane message will be at one, bound together in this vaporous and esoteric percept (see Figure 37), an image of fired bones set into molten wax as tally – a visual metaphor of counting, counting hours, counting days counting lives, counting deaths: counting, counting.

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<sup>28</sup> **NASA Glenn Research Centre**. 2021 “According to the theories of Isaac Newton Absolute time exists independently of any perceiver and progresses at a consistent pace throughout the universe. Unlike relative time, Newton believed ABSOLUTE TIME was imperceptible and could only be understood mathematically”.





Figure 37 : Lapping-Sellars.2021. *Liminality of Waxed Bones as Tally. Fired bones & wax.*

The hypothesis surrounding the nature of time, time in relation to artmaking and specifically to my praxis has provided an underlying ambiguity since the outset. Covid was the driver, but how to read and capture the innards of the disease made daily reading unfold like a novel. Events changed every day, and with every day there was new evidence offering a sequential outflow of human drama. As my praxis unfolded, I observed a type of sequential record of time, and this unconscious detection seemingly became embedded in my work<sup>29</sup>. Such interviews provided a timekeeping of sort, as opinion was viewed, and information unfolded. (See Figure 38.)



Figure 38 : Lapping-Sellars 2020. *Political Opinion Mouthing Views* .As observed over the first 40 days of Lockdown. Drawn and Stitched.

<sup>29</sup> For six weeks I watched news produced by the Chief International Anchor for CNN, Christiane Amanpour. Every night I sat drawing the portraits of interviewees and documenting global opinion of the pandemic. This led to an artwork of a series of portraits mounted into a boxed frame. 'Politics and Pandemic'



## 4.2 The Pendulum and The Pivot.

Here I discuss time, the pendulum as ticker, the chronometer as timekeeper, and the vacuous notion of time's non-existence.

Constant reference has been made to the Artefact as the focus of this study, and indeed it is. Interestingly, when positioned within the context of a pendulum, it is the **pivot** from which the weight is suspended enabling the plumb of the pendulum to swing freely. Its role as chronometer becomes an esoteric metaphor in its capacity to document time, to chronicle events, and to bear witness as it oscillates from side to side, capturing and archiving events in time. It swings and it sways, this side to that, permeating the machinations of global events, the greater the arc to the left, so its twin mirrors its move to the right. In perfect harmony.

Into this rhythmic pace of seeming calm came Covid. Covid. The goad which sent the pendulum into an orbit of wild frenzy, totally fracturing the ambit of time. A year has passed since the first cases of the virus were diagnosed, when the pivot moved from its stable and steady fulcrum into an undulation of disarray, shifting from one side to another. Incredibly, it is still unsteady, as it anxiously gyrates, seeking stasis and some sort of balance – foraging in the dark. Those in the know continue to whisper that there is no benchmark from which to jump, no prototype to look to, no chaperone to traverse across the minefield. Every single individual has been forced to accept the extent of his own vulnerability. Neither blueprint nor guiding manual could have thrown light on this threat; even though men and women, level-headed intellectuals, have continued to try countless avenues to fathom the most appropriate and pragmatic way forward. It has been a minefield of challenge. There are so many hurdles to cross, so many divisive problems to detonate. Of late it has been reported that it will take years to recover, to return once more to the stable life we knew just less than two years ago. Our lives have appeared to swing like pendulums.

The study leads to an understanding that fear is acknowledged as one of the abiding drivers behind the momentum of the pendulum's swing; this dangling thing in suspension which

persistently splays out from its central position, in search of counterpoise. What is the fear and why is it such a driving force within daily life? Earlier reference was made to the silent, intangible nature of the virus, how its hazard is invisible, and how its presence can permeate anywhere and everywhere – at any time.

The research is an attempt to fathom the way Covid had infiltrated everyday living, and human behaviour. Such impact is bound to reflect this anxiety by way of language, comment, posture, and general behaviour. The very vocabulary is said to have embraced a new lexicon of signals.

The question now is why introduce Time? What is its construct and where does this notion fit into the research? Berger (1984: 9) provides a fundamental point of departure:

Man is unique insofar as he constitutes two events. The event of his biological organism ... and the event of his consciousness. Thus, in main, two times exist corresponding with these two events. The time during which he is conceived, grows, matures, ages, dies. And the time of consciousness. The first understands itself. The second time has been understood in different ways in different periods. It is indeed the first task of any culture to propose an understanding of the time of consciousness, of the relations of past to future realized as such.

The Art Object is fundamentally a convoluted artefact. It is seldom something which exists outside of itself, and for that reason to place it into the order of things – something which we are wont to do – it is necessary to position it into a frame of time; a place where the reason for its being can be understood. The regular historian will spend a lifetime searching for clues and assessing facts which will throw light on people's lives, events, objects, and stories, all of which are pertinent and plausible to document the passing of time. This research cannot delve into the discipline of history nor archaeological studies per se, but it is thought that all artworks should be offered appraisal and a form of position in history. It is

fundamental human nature to reassess, to seek explanation, to slot such facts into time; and to categorize any information surrounding the paradox of humankind. There is a compulsion to comprehend, to decipher, to decode mysteries and to solve riddles.

This defines the querulous nature of the spectator to whom this thesis is addressed and who undoubtedly will seek information and explanation. The artmaker too is inquisitive and he seeks answers for ways to trap his ideas in some material form, and irrespective when an art object is made, its forging registers the maker's hand, the workings of his mind, and the times when it was created. This process is not a single, straightforward exercise, Kubler (1978:50) suggests,

The artist is not a free agent obeying only his own will. His situation is rigidly bound by a chain of prior events. The chain is invisible to him, and it limits his motion. He is not aware of the chain, but only as *vis a tergo*, as the force of events behind him.

From Kubler's words one can extrapolate that each object produced is positioned in relation to the one preceding it or the one on the verge of another one being shaped. It is for this reason that the idea of time becomes integral to understanding the artist's process of making. Kubler (1978: 19) purports "Any artwork is actually a portion of arrested happening, or an emanation of the past". As such, the entire conglomeration is one large amalgam<sup>30</sup>.

The aforesaid narrative is an attempt to create some type of metaphorical notion or means to draw a picture in the sand for this study. The Pendulum and the Pivot, as cues, lead through this chapter, a writ of **time** and **events** in their fullness as timekeepers. Chronos is the mythical Greek god who was the personification of time – the god who turned the wheel of time. Chronos need not be the nemesis. So, let us move on, taking time, *harnessing time*, to consider the many twists and turns of the tale which is still being unravelled.

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<sup>30</sup> See chapter 3. 3.1 Coordinating opinion, on the amalgam of ceramic matter that makes up the vessels I create.

This fourth chapter focusses on TIME, considering what it is and what it is not. Perhaps, in the end, the effort to define what it is will be a futile attempt to capture that which is both elusive and illusive, now, and possibly forever. It will remain but a vapour in infinity. The research resumes its pursuit of the ephemeral, and it may very well be yet another attempt to define a *nothingness*. Time seems indiscernible without some form of calculation so the hypothesis that started out to define the notion of vulnerability, may be its silent partner in the form of perception.

#### 4.2.1 Time

Kubler (1978: 13) states:

Time, like mind, is not knowable as such. We know time only indirectly by what happens in it: by observing change and permanence; by marking the succession of events among stable settings; and by noting the contrast of varying rates of change.

The thrust of the study does continually look to the Artefact as both mainstay and storyteller, the raconteur of the impact of Covid. It is **the** object as crux of this thesis, and therefore it exists, in fact, as the Focus of contemplation. The **Thing** that throughout will play a central role in the plot. If the pendulum is the chronometer and the artefact the raconteur, the dialogue provides a documentary of narratives. Yet if each page is about the arcane, the pages will be blank and the reader will be compelled to *create his own impression of its telling*; an overlay of his own personal insight and sense of discernment in relation to Covid, vulnerability, the artmaker and the art object.

It is from the pivot that a pendulum is suspended, and as such the plumb is *without* footing – its nature is one of oscillation and displacement, and, as has been suggested in the previous chapter, like a pendulum, this thesis hovers permanently on the edge of Cause and Effect. Its permanence is always under scrutiny – it remains a narrative of twists and turns seeking to arrest any signs of vulnerability. It is never static. Just as the pendulum moves

from side to side, it provides a lyrical metaphor for the ongoing hypothesis which seeks to underpin the various concepts related to this investigation; suspicions and conjectures moving this way and that. The idea of a shifting pendulum being ever at the ready is evident when a hunch or an inkling comes to the fore. A frisson of something new and the swing becomes prompted to move.

Isaac Newton's first law of motion (NASA Glenn Research Centre: 2021) explained that,

An object will remain at rest or in uniform motion in a straight line unless compelled to change its state by the action of an external force. If an external force is applied, the velocity will change because of the force.

All living things are in a state of constant movement, not only with-in but with-out their bodies. Any encounter will impact on the stasis of the object, and to redress the balance of harmony, action will take place and will trigger the pendulum into motion. Throughout it all, the artefact has remained as the fulcrum of activity, and all extraneous undertakings have revolved in tandem, on the periphery of the hub.

#### **4.3. The Pendulum as Chronometer.**

Timekeeping: Periods of Time.

Wikipedia<sup>31</sup> describes the working of a timekeeper as such:

When a pendulum is displaced sideways from its resting, equilibrium position, it is subject to a restoring force due to gravity that will accelerate it back toward the equilibrium position. The time for one complete cycle, a left swing, and a right swing, is called a Period.

And we all understand periods of time, phases within our personal lives, the lives of others and the epochs within historical time; these can be measured. Intuitively we know that time passes; we watch the ageing process and can feel the throb of a lifeforce. The oscillation of

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<sup>31</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chronometer\\_watch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chronometer_watch)

the pendulum and the ticking of the clock are in sync with the beating of our hearts, the rhythmic pulse assuring us that we are still alive.

#### 4.3.1 The Faces of Time:

The pendulum can be viewed not only as a timekeeper for the seeming truisms described above, but also for calculating events as they happen sequentially. As the earth moves around the sun<sup>32</sup> the timing of light and dark positions the sun as a veritable 'chronometer'. These facts offer visible, tangible concepts of time is passing. Moreover, there are timepieces which offer man a simple system to measure and to quantify time. Sun dials, hourglasses, timekeepers, clocks, watches are all the fiat of *homo faber*: man-made machines to facilitate daily life, to predict the seasons and to increase productivity. Such tangible timekeepers automatically encourage their objective, which is to define limitations and to create structures for daily living.

Nevertheless, despite these concepts, the definition of time *per se* defies comprehension. Time is the focus of the thinking. How to define time, how to describe time, in fact how to investigate time deeply. 'Deep time' was a philosophical concept of geological time developed by James Hutton (1726-1797) and his 'system of the habitable earth', which he believed was a deistic mechanism to keep the world eternally habitable for humans. And that was three hundred years ago. The Australian Aborigines followed exquisite paths of time like Dreaming Tracks whose ways could be trod by their 'Songlines'. Time has provided inspiration for so many thought-provoking conundrums. The mind has been puzzled for as long as humans viewed the earth's revolution. Light came and went. This study continues to follow a shaft of thought, looking at Time, attempting to throw light on its very nature, specifically in relation to the art object and its existence in time. What is time? Kubler (1978:13) states, "Time, like mind, is not knowable as such".

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<sup>32</sup> The sun perceived as a Deity, or a source of power, has played a major role in the history of man. It has been worshipped and has been extolled as the giver of life; its projected rays have been used as shafts of light which would directly focus on venerated sacrificial altars during the peak of both winter and /or summer solstice rays. The sun is a giver of life. As such its personification as timekeeper becomes more a source of light to sustain living matter or to be a ray of inspiration at **certain times** of the year.

#### 4.3.2 The Historian in time:

The role of the art historian is to investigate the time frame of events, and to align the way human beings have positioned themselves in time. Artmaking and its resulting art objects become fused into the passing of time and are a veritable store of information, most of which is retained and revealed within periods of time. True. With assiduous inspection, the *temporal sequence* of artefacts can be documented, and it is reasonable to assume that **that time** can be garnered and stored within the body of the object. All of which furnishes information and meaning, providing an understanding of ‘the what, the when, and the how’ of each artefact. It encourages then the study of a ‘connectedness’ through time. Kubler, (1978:9) cites that:

the history of things is intended to reunite ideas and objects under the rubric of visual forms: the term includes both artefacts and works of art, both replicas and unique examples, both tools and expressions – in short, all materials worked by human hands under the guidance of connected ideas developed in temporal sequence.

Art objects are regularly considered as works of contemplation, pieces to be viewed in a contemplative light. Embedded motifs and meanings enshroud the form within a type of symbolic code in space and time; and, naturally, those who are their arbiters are compelled to understand. A multitude of systems and opinions position an art object for discussion, and it is for this reason that ongoing verbal discussions seem of paramount importance for understanding the nature and motive for each object’s existence, and its place in time.

In the setting of an art gallery, descriptive titles and small cards can be seen next to each work and a catalogue will usually be available to describe, to define and to explain the body of work on display. This is both a courteous and informative gesture that the viewer may fully share and appreciate each piece. The same pattern occurs in art museums and private collections. The spectator needs and wants to know who the artist is, and why, how, and when it was made. The overabundance of art books, art histories, tomes of visual references, debates, lectures, courses, and archaeological studies is so forthcoming and profound that it must follow that the art object is a fascinating and much-appreciated phenomenon.

The pundits who look deeper into the history of such artefacts, will focus carefully, making in-depth studies into how and when each piece was made – and by whom! Material, Method, Reason, Place, are issues scrutinised. All of this will be assembled within the framework of a time frame – that is the role of the historian and the archaeologist.

But that is all about time according to some form of time keeping. Human history is divided into eras from 6,000 BCE, 650 BCE, 500 CE, 1500 CE, 2000 CE. All numerical counters like numbers and dates are used to fathom time and categorize sequence over the millennia. This is all designated by historians, *homines fabri*, to harness and to tabulate time. It is all just numbers assigned by humans attempting to control their fate and their environment. Without man, there are no tools and no way to measure the notion of time. Time exists in a vacuum, Time is Nothing.

#### 4.3.3 Sequential Time in Art.

At the outset of this chapter the study proposed to focus on the impact of time and how it is construed and perceived within the boundaries of the art object. Time is a complex notion; its nature is multi-layered and multifaceted, and is clearly a complex nexus incorporating a broad, open-ended debate. However, time is not the focus of this thesis. Far from it. Instead, it is an attempt to give an overview of how time has been categorised – from the straightforward timekeeper to the esoteric phenomenological, time-conscious theories of philosophers like Varela and Husserl. This study proposes that the **representation of some thing** can capture the *perception* of the passing of time. It is the way in which an object is viewed, observed, and its impact in relation to time may impact perceptual viewing.

In the light of this, a pragmatic way forward would be to consider how time can be identified without the use of man-made tool, that which could position the reflect the passing of time.

#### 4.3.4 Linear Time.

The term linear naturally conjures up an image of a yardstick, a measure, or a mathematical system for counting. This is true, but, in the context of artmaking, a series of works read in



sequence denote a type of time, passing. The explanation is not a simple one as there are many variables related to this category. I suggest, for example, the series of paintings which Monet produced - with one painting following the next - he painted images of haystacks capturing both the light of the day and the season of the year. This is a form of time passing but, each single painting is a unit, and unless the viewer is positioned to walk from one to the next, there is no real designation of time as such. The same argument follows with Monet's painting of Rouen Cathedral. Salvador Dali took a different tack by using extended metaphor and thus used images of symbols which denote time and its passing. He used rotten food, melting clocks, fractured objects amongst the many, many obscure systems to portray his emotional anxiety with time, capturing the idea of time passing as arrested in some of the imagery.

My artworks are also artefacts created within time. The role of time and its passing becomes embedded and reflected in the work I have produced. On the one hand the figures are portrayed as bodies whose gestures of vulnerability are frozen in time and the vessels are the result of the suspended amalgam of inorganic matter which bonded in time as they were subjected to the heat of the kiln. The total body of the work in its entirety, every piece produced, follows a sequential format, reflecting the physical time of their being created. My praxis is an all-encompassing journal of this period, a body of work that serves as a document of the Covid path, which can, of course be tracked, **in real** time. It started in Wuhan as a disease, with the rumours targeting the pangolin as a source of the virus, and then the path of its footprint went viral. The question prevails: does such output of art, at this time, warrant explanation? For the odd spectators who have not been exposed to the vulnerability of Covid, nor to the form of work I produce, I imagine that it necessitates an attachment of explanation to comprehend and appraise its validity. Yes? The real question would be to consider whether over time, ten, twenty, fifty years each object would be relevant at all. I will never know.

**Conclusion:**

Such summation of the pendulum as a timekeeper is a harsh reminder that time is passing. This nudge is an uncomfortable prompt. Everyone is aware of the brevity of life, and as an artist who has felt the compulsion to document times during Covid-19, it is appropriate to discuss the nature of the beast and to probe the cogitation of her mind.

## CHAPTER FIVE.

### The Marrow Laid Bare

“Death is someone you see very clearly with eyes in the centre of your heart: eyes that see not by reacting to the light, but by reacting to a kind of chill from within the marrow of your own life.”

Thomas Merton. 1948

#### Introduction

This is a chapter that goes to the very heart of the praxis; a study of personal phraseology that surrounds the research. It encompasses a somewhat private viewing of the workings of a mind and becomes privy to the unique, individual language of the artmaker. It provides a perceptual view of the narrative of this thesis. The title of this chapter is *The Marrow laid Bare*, and its content offers the quintessence of the individual artist’s creative act, emanating from the deepest unconscious, the ‘marrow’ of the artist, and, in metaphorical terms, lodged deeply in the bones, in the body- core. The body-mind. I have already explained that the study is a practice-based study. Practice-based research facilitates and sustains the notion that the deep-seated compulsion to create lies firmly in the bones and the marrow of its maker. This chapter delves into the thinking and the imagining, the discovery, and inventions that epitomise the processes of such creative activity. I do not attempt a definitive explanation for the said compulsion to create artefacts, but I do understand now that artmaking has a language of its own, distinctive, and unrepeatable with methods that express thoughts, feelings, and emotions unique to the individual artist. In a myriad of ways, artists find, discover, and disclose that for which there are no words. Here, I explore the proposition of creativity which resides in the marrow and comes out in the medium. Embedded in and through my artworks, there resides a diction of materials, a lexicon of marks, and a dialect of utterance. I structure my attempt as follows:

#### 5.1 The Skeleton of the Praxis

#### 5.2 The Heart of the Issue

#### 5.3 The Brain, the Mind. The Driver

#### 5.4 Bones for Research, Bones for Recollection, Bones for Ash

### 5.1 The Skeleton of the Praxis

The year of 2020 was the year of Covid-19, a period engulfed by a tsunami of mayhem and disaster; and now well into 2021 the storm has not abated. Humans have somehow dug deeply into their psyches and found simple ways to survive the stress and cope with the new norm. This study has followed the pattern of endurance when vulnerability was presented at its most extreme. This constant reference relating to an arcane thread of the unsayable appeared to dominate many aspects of the research, this skulking, nonmaterial presence in its profusion of guises. It remains unsayable and, even I, as the artmaker and protagonist, have neither fathomed nor been able to harness its presence. Yet its impact has penetrated my marrow. It has changed the way I view things, the lifestyle I live, the work that I do and the habitual praxis of my vision – in fact, my habitus.

Bourdieu (1984:28) defines ‘habitus’ as a type of unconscious learning which occurs during social encounter; be it the interaction of impressions that arise, lessons and skills that are acquired or thought processes that may develop. Such integral information filters into an amalgam of perception and as such is stored within the unconscious mindset of the individual. Bourdieu (1990b: 56) argues that habitus is not consciously remembered as history (that being specialised by structures over the course of time) but rather as “spontaneity without consciousness or will”. It is, in truth, how the individual perceives and projects his personal reality from within, both as a singular extant and independent personality. In this way, he will generate the synthesis of inherited DNA, parental dictate, and cultural exposure. The impact of the Covid epidemic plagued what had been the equilibrium of such status quo and, as the goalposts seemed to have moved, so too had the nature of habitus.

My praxis has registered a major shift in which I appear to have found a new voice, a place where my essence surely resides, and a place I had not known before. I question whether this had perchance always lain dormant in my marrow, awaiting some sort of somatic realization. The hypothesis at the outset of this research was to comprehend how vulnerability could be trajected to the viewer by way of an artefact – and, in my case,

through the aegis of my practical artmaking. It was the abject frailty of those hundreds of migrants that reverberated in the depth of my being – in my gut, as it were (see Figure 39).



Figure 39 : (A reminder) Lapping-Sellars 2020. *Detail of Repatriation*. Porcelain figures

I have already described the historical triggers in detail, but of late I have come to realize that deep within both my subconscious, and indeed my unconscious, resides a host of symbolic notions, a veritable, coded substrata of memories and associations that are intrinsic to the way I see things and how I react. Encoding is a cognitive process, and it is the way that thoughts and perceptions are translated into memory. As such they will become a palimpsest of superimposed stories, happenings and memories that have had impact, be they pleasurable, poignant, or painful. Together it would all complete the kaleidoscope of my own narrative, capable of offering me a type of mindset to harness the state of my inner being.

## 5.2 The Heart of the Issue

Making art is the equivalent to answering a call, to responding to an inner longing for a soul mate, and during, the process of making, a form of affirmation of one's existence becomes manifest. Legend has it that when Henry Moore was asked by Robert Hughes, the *Time* Magazine art critic, to explain the inspiration behind his monumental '*Mother and Child*', Moore's response was simple, "If I had words, I would not have used stone".

My personal deliberation in respect of my art making is not unlike that of Moore's purported response. I find it almost impossible to explain what motivates my creative thrust nor can I find words to describe what I feel. All I know is that when I am working, I am happy

and when I cannot be creative, I am depressed. What does that say? I have a driving urgency to be creative, every day. When I begin, I cannot predict the way forward, but as I work it becomes a continuum of experience, discovery, and invention. I have no evidence that this is felt ubiquitously, nor can I confirm that this is the norm and the general feeling of the masses. I have taught long enough to know that there are some individuals who have no interest in artmaking whatsoever. But a rider to this thinking is the following: Creativity is manifest in most people, but the forms they choose as manners and methods of expression are most pertinent to themselves. From cake icing to the threading of trout fishing flies, from painting walls to writing programmes, from penning poetry to forging a blade, each does it in his or her own way. This requires a certain passion, a definitive energy and strong, creative pulse. I understand and respect this. For me, my person, I am an artist and I find it difficult to articulate precisely what prompts me. It is difficult and I have few words, in fact the words can surely be found in the muted message of my work. The power of my work is impossible to formulate. Should I feel a vulnerability, it would lie in the dictum of my work's acceptability. And that of course lies in the dictum of the viewer! Whether my praxis is valid, legitimate, and profoundly meaningful in the context of current socio-political circumstances depends on the time and day of its viewing, on the norms of each society and the academic art institutions. All I can do is vouch for its integrity and truth.

My art during lockdown has encompassed a visual language both personal and private to me. I have come to realise that by way of exchange and interchange with the viewers I can create a dialogue, thereby forging a conversation between me, my work, and any other. By making art I give shape and material form to my thoughts and sensations – those which are embedded at a subconscious level – feelings for which I do not have words. I find I can explore vulnerability (see figures 40 and 41) through my materials, and thus I am able to externalise that which has become internalised within me. Shapes and forms emerge and resonate out of that which has been observed in times past. These images emerge from an echo of times past, knowing known, feelings felt. Slowly as I work, the art objects emerge, like buds opening, surreptitiously encoded with mnemonics, memories.



Figure 40 : Lapping-Sellars. 2021.

*The Abject Peoples. Ceramic*



Figure 41 : Lapping-Sellars. 2021. *The Abject Peoples. Ceramic*

### 5.3 The Brain, the Mind, the Driver

Berger (1973: 8) proffers that, “The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe”. And our belief system is encoded with message, signs, symbols, words, and meanings. It is arranged in a vast merger of our very being and it is updated daily.

I continue to seek a way of capturing a form of *the abject* in my work, objects which do not only project a state of vulnerability but whose stance according to Levi-Strauss (1973:71)<sup>33</sup>, exist as frozen in “a mental instant.” In my case these objects come projected as forms of slumped shapes, emanating gestures of frail images (see Figure 42).

<sup>33</sup> Levi-Strauss: (Burnham. 1973:71) “Art reduces the physical flow of temporal events to a mental instant, a frozen conceptual order which remains in effect as long as the work itself.”



Figure 42 : Lapping-Sellars, 2021 *Collapsed*. Ceramic

In this manner I transfer the ephemeral state of frailty into each piece I make, reflecting, in fact, my vulnerable self. This preferred interface has developed during my experience of life in lockdown, and such *modus operandi* of my work infers my own hand and my creative act; something which is pivotal in transmitting that experience as a communal, and globally, significant experience. My work continues to investigate the abject state; something which I intuitively seek to convey and to be comprehensible, by way of simple inference. A visual and cultural signification of my making could serve my generations and frame the research question I am proposing. That is my aim. My work was produced and conceived *as news of the virus unfolded in its current time*. As a result, it now has the historical weight to act as a reflection of events that happened, *at the time* of each event happening – this being candidly as I perceived it to be. As a result of which, it has become a record of the Covid



trail, a chronicle of events which unfolded as the days went by – a process in time, a relay of events.<sup>34</sup>

I have lived a very full life, one which has presented times of both extreme highs and extreme lows. Now, with reasonable certainty, in and through my art as vehicle, I can affirm that I know I have a strong and stable emotional quotient. I understand the notion of frailty, I can identify it, and I believe that I have an understanding the frailty of others. Analogous to that of self, is the something that undoubtedly grows as life presents its challenges. I imagine that, attached to this inference, is the implication that the type of art I make reflects this. I comprehend affliction and can empathise with the vulnerable, the abject and the hapless.

During the past year, my artmaking has reflected these frail sensations, and I have felt compelled to use materials which somehow reflect transparency and potential disintegration. Wax, oiled cloth, clay and mixed media have provided a means to make figures without arms and bowed heads and suspended mannikins. As I have approached the next stage of this narrative, I have become engaged with the concept of ritual and the somewhat benign proclivity of renewed customs. Such innocent gestures as the wearing of masks, the sanitising of hands and the social distancing gestures have become habitual gestures. My considered understanding has extended these signals as part of ritualistic habitus, whose thought process had led my work to an avenue of research, bound to ritual, ritual as surrender, sacrifice, and supplication. The idea of a reliquary became a metaphor which inspired the libation vessels, and because such supplication invariably includes talismans, some sort of liquid, be it holy, blessed, hallowed, or honoured, it required a vessel to contain it. Fluid as a libation; revered and held in libation vessels. These are the objects which have served as the final muse of my praxis. The repositories are jugs, each required to have a handle and a spout – such dictates make them pourers and thus containers for discharging liquid. My pitchers however present as objects in an abject state,

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<sup>34</sup> The concept of TIME, Contemporary and Contemporaneous is discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis..

on the verge of collapse and totally unable to either hold liquid or to pour. They project a state of subsidence, trajecting vulnerability in the extreme (See Figures 43 and 44).



Figure 43 : Lapping-Sellars. 2021. *Libation Vessel*. Ceramic



Figure 44 : Lapping-Sellars. 2021. *Libation Vessel*. Ceramic

#### 5.4 Bones for Research, Bones for Recollection, Bones for Ash

Bachelard, (1969: xxxii, xxxiii) suggests that “the imagination is ceaselessly imagining and enriching itself with new images.” He continues that by describing and conveying the image of a house, as metaphor, he defines it both as space and content. In this way it can be likened to the nature of the mind and its capacity for imagination. He suggests that the space within the house is composed of furnished rooms, with boxes and drawers, nooks and crannies, hidey holes, and tiny cracks, in fact an amalgam of the entire domicile. Using a similar analogous metaphor, he likens the contents of the house to the conscious and unconscious psyche with images encased in deep-seated memory, described, by some, as the soul<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> It must be stressed that the term ‘soul’ in this context does in no way refer to any form of religious interpretation but is rather used as a term for an embodiment of emotional or intellectual energy, the quintessence of the mind.

In this context, the metaphysical debate becomes a form of ekphrasis whereby the image of the 'house filled with content' can be likened to our psyche, our experiences, our memories, and, as individuals, we can traverse the boundaries of our heads using a form of noumena of experiences encapsulating our own conscious daily living.

## CHAPTER SIX.

### The Denouement

Copious avenues of thought and dialectic theories have been presented in this study, all seeking a type of clarity of vision. In a way it has become a 'turning in' on itself, and the study is back to where it began. Hypothetically speaking, this can be likened to the depiction of the two mirrors facing each other, and, as each reflection captures and emulates the other, so does each story reflect and reverberate itself, going on, and on, and on. Indeed, this is what has emerged from the vapour trail of Covid wherein every being presented itself – to itself – an very enactment of reflexivity, presented as a vapour trail, the arcane discourse of sensation.

It began as viewers across the world watched thousands of migrants walking home – humans in time, reticent, fearful, and blatantly vulnerable, those being compelled to walk uncertain of what the future had in store. They were just walking, walking. *Repeat*. Walking. Walking. They had relinquished their ties, abandoned their places of shelter, tossed aside all artefacts, and discarded their begging bowls<sup>36</sup>. They turned their backs on their past.

At the outset, I would contemplate the words of the title, a phrase which initially presented as an amalgam of mystical notions. Slowly my writing and my praxis clarified the enigma, and I found both understanding and coherence as I progressed. Now I fully appreciate how vulnerability can be trajected by way of an artefact, and I have made objects which serve as physical proof. In addition, the little begging bowls were in fact vessels, quintessential archetypical shapes of containers, which held the memory of lives lived. The libation vessels whose making and marks belong to my hands are the culmination of the story, yet they remain vulnerable pitchers in a frozen state of collapse.

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<sup>36</sup> The begging bowls were vessels whose spaces embodied their livelihood, and now at the close of this study the libation vessels reify a source of comfort by way of rites of passage. Passages. Passages. Walking. Walking.

The ritual jugs in this praxis were made as an offering of hope to the living, a reminder, and an acknowledgment, that vulnerability is a reality, and that humans can realign a stable habitus. Life, and its span on this earth, is no more than an odyssey with a beginning and an end. A fresh strain of Covid, another hydra, will return in new guise; reappearing, rearing its head and threatening the status quo. During my praxis, heat, fire, flames, ash, have all played an important role within the mega-theory of this research, and, just as the Phoenix's leap from the flames symbolised a renewal and rebirth, so must the display of Libation vessels project *a form of hope*, a way to reimagine life tomorrow. Berger (1984: 33. 78) purports that,

What we mourn for the dead is the loss of their hopes. One's death is already one's own. It belongs to nobody else: not even to a killer. This means that it is already part of one's life.

The suggestion of a denouement indicates a certain finality, a closure, and a completion to the narrative as thesis; a story that has embraced the impact of the Covid virus on the global populace. Yet as the research evolved and expanded, so the study seemingly adopted its own dynamic of singular progress. As one thing led to another, so ideas emerged revealing other layers, which, in turn, opened further fresh reflection. The amalgam of words became its own potent microcosm of thoughts and ideas, **the archetype of an object**. The potent artefact *as reflection of my own psyche*.

Exploring words to establish the study, those that would become attached to this theory as practice-led, was more of a challenge to me than making my art. Frequently my imagination and mental musings became scrambled in search of ways to harness such abstracted designs. My gut response always prevailed, and I would be compelled to seek some form of tactile, physical substance to capture my personal perceptions, emotions, and gestures. I needed to trap my emotional response in a physical material, using my hands to make marks. The work I produced therefore became a type of *embodiment* of sensation.

On the other hand, the creative exploration of writing, that of making a legible treatise, and of producing a thing that dealt with *words and ideas*, slowly became an artefact, *an object in its own right*. The myriad of theories and turns of phrase that was available as material for research was no different to that of the abundance of art materials for the praxis. Such bipartite choice eventually became an amalgam of study. A union of One Thesis and One Praxis. As the artmaker of this exercise, I was beholden to choose what to read, how to interpret it, what to assemble, and which ideas to put forth as my own research. It became a dialogue heralding the semblance of something agreed upon between the material of expression and the creative thinking of the writer. It became its own reality, a pneuma of its own. And it emerged as its own artwork.

Being both writer and artist responsible for this research, I have a psyche embedded with memories, with experiences and with events that have provided evocative imagery, symbolic triggers, and coded marks. All of which have come to the fore as I have lived during the months of Covid. My mind's eye has added to this vault, assured by the words of Bachelard, (1969: 86) who says: "an image that issues from the imagination is not subject to verification by reality". For many reasons, I now understand why such mnemonics, so deeply embedded, have materialized and how profoundly my own vulnerability has been exposed.

The title of Kay's autobiography, 1989, *Everything We Do is a Portrait of Ourselves*, suggests that we are the custodians of our individual humanity. Lone, singular, and sui generis. As humans we accumulate data and write our own stories, perceiving everyday life as a story, which we invest into the heart of our identity. In fact, our ability to 'narrate' our life's events may even be the intrinsic marks of consciousness. When I refer to Heidegger's idea (1962) of The Jug, and the SPACE in the jug, I repeat the idea that the space in the vessel holds the essence of its physical self. To this end, the metaphorical *house/brain* stores the *mind/soul/mind*.<sup>37</sup> Our quietude lies within and has little to do with bricks and mortar.

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<sup>37</sup> And of late, the libation vessels I have made will serve as metaphorical objects as part of the entire denouement of the research.

Berger (1984:64) writes about the domicile as both traditional dwelling and a place in the mind where both habitus and the familiar reside. For this reason, shelter, as a place filled with a montage of memories, can embody **home**.<sup>38</sup> He suggests,

[to] the underprivileged, home is represented, not by a house, but by a practice or set of practices. Everyone has his own. These practices, chosen and not imposed, offer in their repetition, transient as they be in themselves, more permanence, more shelter than any lodging. Home is no longer a dwelling but the untold story of a life being lived.

The objects which contain memory, and which provide a variety of interesting notions are Bones. Bones that essentially do not disintegrate, and, as DNA testing or radiocarbon testing affirms, much information can be gleaned from this osseous matter. The bones have mysteriously provided the answer to the enigmatic quest. Digging deeply to reveal the intangible and the ephemeral – the ‘dialect without utterance’, there remained an avenue of data which was in fact physically tangible.

The Praxis and its research became a unit for the exhumation of ideas. Bones make up the skeleton of the body, and the framework of the study, and provide information for the researcher. Bones carry memory, they evoke response, and, in my praxis, bones have become markers to tally time, as months and years, and as document of lives lived and lives lost. As fired relics they are a source of calcium for my glazes!

One perpetually asks, “Where are those who died, those whose bones are embedded in the ash?” Berger (1984:15) retorts, “the dead are the imagination of the living”?

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<sup>38</sup> It is interesting to note that where in English we refer to Home as a place and space of refuge, the French do not have a word for home. ‘Chez nous’ implies, ‘at home’ but ‘home’ for the French is described as ‘le feu’ – the fire(place). How poignant to associate fire with home warmth, sharing, cooking togetherness.

## The Epilogue

Binding the loose ends together and wrapping it all up.

Yes. But the ties that bind remain as physical reminders of those gone, and those who sustain the living. Tangled threads of rhetoric have been wrapped around the global daily news. Innocent, the quizzical discussion has become twisted in a web of uncharted territory – desperate hushed voices of impending gloom: “*How much longer will Covid-19 threaten the populace? How many more people are going to die?*” With a casual shrug, the rejoinder retorts, “*How long is a piece of string?*”

The concept of a string or a thread and its interminable length has provided a form of metaphorical conjecture, as both a *knowing*, that being the concrete object, the string, and its *variable*, the length. **The truth remains in the shrug.** The candour of the matter is that there is no finite answer. No one knows how long Covid will be with us. Viruses are present in the human body all the time – much like a piece of string and beyond. The variable, as the unknown length of time, affords temporary closure. Ironically, a theory in physics known as ‘the string theory’, describes how strings propagate through space and interact with each other. Does this have any bearing in this context?

Extrapolating on the notion of string or twine, I am reminded of the notion of *ties* – ‘the ties that bind us.’ And, considering the self-same ‘off the cuff’ remark relating to the length of string, the flip side of the coin (and an interesting analogy) can be drawn using the string as a **trope**, as ‘*a tie that binds.*’ As such it becomes no longer a somatic reality, but rather is presented as an *emotional* attachment, and the length of the string becomes the *physical* attachment that holds it all together.

Where this study finds its finite place is employing the idea of **a piece of string, a thread.** and tracing its path through a miscellany of ideas, readings, concepts, discoveries, performing its role as THE ARCANES THREAD that has woven its way through the entire



study, and has been trapped in the dialogue, *the dialect without utterance*. A spider, as artefact, in a web of words.

The research has become an ekphratic<sup>39</sup> narrative in time, a form of describing and reflecting both on the thesis and on the praxis, thereby creating a complete picture that projects the inanimate notion of vulnerability. What is presented is the materialization of tangible objects, pieces of work embedded with meaning, encasing vulnerability as both the vehicle and the focus of communication. The idea of this research commenced as a somewhat innocent gut response to the vagaries of my mind. Covid was a word and news of its threat was far removed from the reality of my daily life. Why walking émigrés, or tossed aside little bowls, became mental triggers demanding material creation will remain an enigma. I have no idea. But I was forced to make those little begging bowls, all 200 of them, and to start drawing those people, walking – compulsively. How to define this urge or how such longing manifests itself defies logic. Perchance Boden (1992: 1) can explain with his words:

Creativity itself is seemingly a mystery, for there is something paradoxical about it, something which makes it difficult to see how it is even possible. How it happens is indeed puzzling, but that it happens at all is deeply mysterious.

Like many narratives, this one is open-ended. It has drawn on current events and conditions of the day to write my story about Covid-19. It is an archive of thoughts and sensations prompted by the impact of an extraordinary pandemic. The chronicle and the artefacts have become integrally woven as one unit, bound tightly together by the sensation of vulnerability. The culmination is a single amalgamation of human endeavour. A tangible artefact and arcane vessel replete with meaning.

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<sup>39</sup> "Ekphratic" (adjective); "ekphrasis" (noun). The word denotes a clear, intense, self-contained argument or verbal description of an object, especially of an artwork (<https://www.wordsense.eu/ekphratic/>)



Figure 45 : Lapping-Sellars 2021. *Libation Vessel*. Ceramic.

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